EMIGRE 34

$Seven.ninetyfive

Rebirth of Design

CONTENTS:

Dear Emigre.

Here is a gift for you.

A strange coincidence: I have carried this thing in my purse
for quite a while and was surprised to see her male partner on the
cover of Emigre [32]. So I pass it on to you all.

Weird, huh?

So long for now,
Smarty Pants

Dear Emigre.

A few days ago, while on an excursion to Sac-
ramento with my wife, I was able to slip away
and visit your office. Although it isn't really a
retail set-up, Tim was nice enough to let me
nose around, purchase a font, a CD sampler,
the Bauhaus book, and let me peruse your
stack of *Emigre* back issues (none earlier
than issue 20). Though intrigued by most of
what you do, and a big fan of your design
work (so far), I wanted to read some of your
articles before subscribing. I'm generally
wary of theoretical magazines (magazines
that concern theory, not magazines that only
exist in theory), if for no other reason than
they are usually a very dry read (boring). Af-
ter leafing through some issues, I was com-
pelled to buy the issue devoted to Designers
Republic, and by kind of a flip of the coin, I
also picked up issue number 32.

Issue 29 was everything I hoped it would be,
with a solid interview covering a variety of is-
sues, addressed by a bright, earnest per-
petrator of innovative design. I urge you to
pursue this editorial direction, allowing ar-
ticulate, ambitious designers the chance to
deal with intriguing questions in a thorough
manner, with appropriate examples for refer-
ence. I admire all the DR work I've seen so
far, even though it has a sensibility and de-
sign approach very alien to my visual sense.
Although I find it hard to decipher their rules
of composition as I look at the work, it really
spurs my creative drive, visually and in-
tellectually.

On the other hand (you probably knew this
was coming), issue 32 represents much of
what I fear when considering a subscription.
Issue 32 seems a rather rambling collection
of musings and unspecified considerations by
bright people who have some good ideas, but
lack focus, tossing out possibilities without
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ment on your publication, so here goes: even
though I'm afraid I'll be guilty of at least one
of the criticisms I will level against your well-
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meander my way through the criticism.) An-
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the tenuous wandering about from one topic
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Marc Bartlett's essay, "Beyond The Margins Of The Page," embarks on what this reader finds fatuous in such like-minded pieces. Though touching on the nature of myth and language and such can be very pertinent to design, it takes far too long for Mr. Bartlett to get me to any point relevant to design. His wildly veering train of thought, dressed-up with some fair imagery goes more places than a week long Star Trek festival, though in a far shorter space of time, and without the special effects. Perhaps in an attempt to follow in the illustrious footsteps of the thinkers he quotes, he writes very colorful prose, full of illuminations about our society. Unfortunately, he assumes we take each statement as a natural fact, a *fait accompli*. Many of the assumptions he takes for granted are questionable at best: easily debated, if not outright refuted. As we follow the line of falling dominoes, we are supposed to respond to each successive revelation with an appropriate "Aha!" Perhaps my density is what makes me stop too often and go "Huh?" Mr. Bartlett says: "Language, it turns out, is an opaque domain." *Who sez*? Such transcendent declarations of abstract concepts violate more than a few rules of logic. It wouldn't take too much effort to put forth a credible argument that language is transparent. "Given the incorrigible independence of language...: Well, I ask densely, if it's so independent, how can it be "inextricable from culture" (as Mr. Bartlett states in a previous paragraph)? Before venturing into such territory, the writer needs far better backing than a few oblique quotes, and clever turns of phrase. Sure you can write volumes on such a subject, or talk for days about it, if you have nothing else to do. This reader would rather Mr. Bartlett find somewhere else to do it.

I'm sure there are some (probably many) who will say that I missed the point of Mr. Blauvelt or Mr. Bartlett. If I did (which is certainly possible), whose fault is that, really? Am I that dense? or was the meaning more than a bit muddy?

Under critical analysis, a point needs to be made, a theory pursued to a clarifying conclusion, and that clarifying conclusion needs to illuminate the nature of the subject matter and validate the critique. The writing must be straightforward and coherent, with footnotes at a minimum (better yet, none at all). If others can say it better, then we should be reading them. And, it seems to me, David Carson, Margo Chase, Malcolm Garrett, and Ian

Anderson are much more pertinent to what we do than Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, and so on. After so many years of suffering the ubiquitous quoting of Barthes, Derrida and Lacan, I've grown bored of their ethereal proclamations and oblique inferences, which have proven to be better cocktail chatter than philosophical enlightenment. Having read enough work by those thinkers to acquaint myself with their general train of thought (if by no other means than endless quotes in academic treatises), I am struck more by their lack of impact than their cogent observations. Writers serious about art, society, and structure might be better served by a familiarity with Sartre's *Literature and Existentialism*. (It's more accurately about Marxism and Criticism.) Mostly, I'm tired of this basic format: "As Barthes (or another suitably post-modern, trendy type thinker) states in *XYZ*...." A worthy critical analysis can survive on its own merits, without relying on external justification; also, blessedly, leaving out the quotes makes it shorter. Skillful critical commentary needs to be concise and self-reliant, as well as entertaining. If the essay bores us as readers, we won't remember it, much less finish reading it. We visually pursue excitement and persuasion in our business, promoting our viewpoint in an entertaining fashion; why should our reading be different? I think the writers in issue 32 should read less Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, et. al, and read more of Suzi Gablik, Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg (even Howard Rosenberg), Pauline Kael, Leslie Fiedler; aw, heck... they should at least borrow a few style tips from Camille Paglia – at least their posturing would be entertaining.

What do I think should be put in instead? Well, the relatively short essay by Zuzana Licko near the end of issue 32 is quite nice; more of that would be better, and of course, more pieces like that on the Designers Republic. I think you, Rudy and Zuzana, should spend more time writing from your perspective. Being high-profile proponents of a controversial approach makes your opinions of great interest. I also found a very nice piece in a recent issue of *U&lc* [by Steven Heller] that compared the look of *Rolling Stone, Ray Gun,* and the like. It was to the point, had an opinion and went for the core of its subject matter.

By now, having read a sizable stack of abstracts, extracts, hat racks, treatises and graduate papers concerning art, I think *Emigre* should put forth its intellectual message with the same vigor and assertiveness that characterizes its visual message. I found the layout and design for the Blauvelt piece far more invigorating than the content. Actually, I found much of what Mr. Blauvelt had to say interesting; but the style was soooooooo dry and "lecturely" it was tough to take it seriously. Unconvincing convictions make for uninteresting reading. Even if the logic is sound, the tone is weak. Take the ball and

run! Seize the day! Spill the wine! Shake that thing! Mix that metaphor! It's much more exciting to be challenged by Tabasco than Pablum.

Among the glories of graphic design are its populist nature, its freedom from academic shackles, its freedom from afternoons of black turtlenecks, white wine in plastic glasses and roundabouts concerning Mapplethorpe. I love the fact that Joe Bob Briggs is more pertinent to graphic design than J. Lacan or R. Barthes (or R. Mutt, for that matter). To my way of thinking, graphic design owes more to Groucho Marx than Karl Marx, and I view suspiciously anyone who ignores the frivolity, the kitsch, the pure "bombasticity" (yes, I made that word up) of what we do. I love the humor. I love the camp. When your magazine relates to the campy, the humorous, the bombastic world of real graphic design and not just the tiny world of the coffee bar at CCAC, then I'll subscribe.

But that's just my opinion, and I could be wrong.

Pat Watson, Artist/Designer, Graphic Design Instructor, and Part-time Propeller Head, Truckee, California.

Dear Emigre,
I have long felt that one of the virtues of your magazine was that it was relatively Steven Heller-free, but this seems to have changed in recent issues. I know that it is hard to fill pages, but must you give over your precious real estate to someone who already enjoys such wide publication? Or is there no such thing as too much Steven Heller?

I've been trying to resist the Heller-bashing that followed his "Ugly" essay: it's so much more fun not to think about the confusion that his well-meaning writing so often manages to accomplish. But I must respond to his recent essay, "Design is Hell," [*Emigre* №33] because he manages to misuse (or misunderstand) a quotation from my essay, "On Overcoming Modernism," [*I.D.* magazine, Sept/Oct, 1992] so extremely that I had to read his essay several times to try to unravel it. Why is it that Heller's writing, which seems so reasonable on the surface, makes no sense upon more careful reading? The problems are not in his writing style, but in his ongoing misrepresentation of the very ideas he so fervently promotes, and his continuing promulgation of that misunderstanding.

In "War is Hell" (as I think I understand it), Heller attributes the on-going "small war" in the design press to the recalcitrance of a few old Moderns to admitting that the kids are all right, and that this has caused the kids, particularly those young tomatoes nurtured in the "academic hothouses," to think that there may in fact be differences or discontinuities between historical design and contemporary design, between the Modern and the postmodern, and therefore to experience an unfortunate detachment from the Modern. Heller says "Modernism is a casualty of this war

Dear Emigre,
Aside from some of the misgivings in the previous post, my main problem with the new format is not entirely *Emigre*'s fault. My issue 33 came with a big fat crease right down the middle from the mail carrier folding it and putting it in my mail slot. Even though I had to go to the post office to pick up past issues, at least I knew I was probably getting a pristine copy of *Emigre*. Since the post office doesn't give a shit (especially here in Chicago) how the mail gets into my house, I'm worried that future issues will be even more seriously mangled. The white envelope itself was completely ripped open at one end. I've canceled my sub to *Metropolis* for the same reasons. (Of course they ship completely without protection of any kind.)
My sub to *Emigre* isn't saving me much and at least I know I can get a pristine copy from Urbis Orbis, a coffee house within walking distance of my house. They even have back issues to Nº30 for those of you in Chi who want them.
And that's another thing. Walking across the large space to the newsstand in Orbis, one of first mags I see is *Emigre*, standing really tall and loud on the top shelves. I'm gonna miss that.
Rick Powell (Now Serving)

Dear Emigre,
Rudy, not to worry. The new format is just fine. Much easier to actually take to the office and read at lunch. Much easier to READ. I'm really enjoying Blauvelt's article (parts 1 & 2). And it's nice to see Steven Heller in there too.
The new size will likely cut down on the number of large-scale poster graphics we're so used to seeing, but I'm sure you'll find a workaround.
Anyway, I'm happy with it. Just don't make the text type any smaller, my old eyes won't take it. Thanks.
Phil Noldo (America Online)

Dear Emigre,
When you sell your soul, you have to constantly look over your shoulder. (That is not a good way to live.)
Sorry to see it happen.
Robin Brown, Lee, New Hampshire

Dear Emigre,
Sorry Rudy... I just do not think the smaller size does your design work justice. Sure, it's easier to read at lunch time, but so are millions of other publications. *Emigre* is not meant to be like millions of other publications. You're losing a positive quality of the magazine that not only affects the way the type looks on the page, but the way it sits on the news and shelf, and how it becomes almost poster size when you flop it open. I understand it had to be done but you can't make me like it.

I'd also like to thank you and your magazine for helping me through four years of design school in the most conservative city ever...Washington D.C.
RideStr8 (America Online)

Dear Emigre,
Just thought I'd let you know, I love the new "portable" *Emigre*. I can now carry it to work and read it all day! Well done!!
SpriggsM (America Online)

Dear Emigre,
I was really disappointed by the new format at first, as I was looking forward to watching the mail person try to stuff *Emigre* into my mailbox. But then I read it, and once again it proved the anti-law of design: you can't judge a book by its cover. Excellent breadth of articles. You have made me think.
Chris MacGregor, PenUltimate (America Online)

Dear Emigre,
Why? Why? Why Shrink it? Anyway, I'm still a big fan of the magazine and will be continually supportive by renewing my subscription. After all, it's contents that counts.
Leticia S. Lau

Dear Emigre,
I have just received issue 33 and I am bloody annoyed!
Michael Smith, Littlehampton, England

Dear Emigre,
Was it increases in paper and postage costs that triggered your switch to a smaller format? I'm the art director for a trade publication that was recently hit with 25% hike in paper prices. We're raising our ad rates and subscription prices to cover the difference.
Having said that, I personally would pay more for the larger version of *Emigre*. Ten dollars or even twelve dollars a copy would not be too much. And as long as I'm venting, let's have more cutting edge design shown, rather than talked about, in the pages of *Emigre*. Nuts 'n' honey.
Marc Oxborrow (America Online)

Dear Emigre,
First of all, I'd like to say that I have no objection whatsoever to the new magazine size. In fact, I think it's quite sweet. Even in the world of cutting-edge graphic design, there's always room for a little sweetness. Secondly, I am strongly against the idea of "Publishing more design criticism and other writings related to graphic design." I have not been buying *Emigre* off and on for the past few years to read lengthy articles on design criticism. I have been buying it to look at typographical images from around the world and read the odd inter-

view. This is what *I* want from *Emigre* and I will be sad to see it diminish.
Goodbye,
RJ Lockley, Bristol, England.

Dear Emigre,
...I really respect your magazine and find it quite inspiring and thought provoking. I also really like the smaller format and your inclusion, recently, of a lot more dialogue and text.
The new format is like the beginning of a new series of works, almost like a new identity, yet with a strong connection to the old one.
With the size change, perhaps so changes the focus to newer/different ideas.
Best regards,
Steve Roden, Los Angeles, CA

Dear Emigre,
I've have just purchased the new *Emigre* Nº33 and would like to say how much I appreciate the new size. As one who doesn't own a car and uses public transportation, this new size is wonderfully convenient to carry around. It is also much easier to store on my bookshelf – half of it isn't sticking out waiting for someone to bang into it, leaving it permanently rumpled. Although I am happy about the size changing, I am also very happy that the quality of the content hasn't.
Yours,
Hannah (Now Serving)

Oh dear. Ohdearohdearohdear...
Not only is the new *Emigre* a new shape but the shape it arrives in has also changed. The breakfast-tray of a box that our mailman was never tempted to insert into a six-inch slot has been replaced by a flimsy envelope that he folds quickly in half and forces through, with pitiable effect on both magazine and subscriber.
All formats are valid, but this method of mailing is definitely inferior. Is there no cardboard left in California to stiffen the envelope and prevent a fetishist's tears?
Bernard Kelly (Now serving)

Dear Emigre,
I must admit I was surprised and a bit dismayed when I opened up the white envelope from *Emigre* last night. I wrongfully assumed it was going to be an announcement of the new issue or of a new font. But when I realized, no, this is the new *Emigre*, I started to moan "No,no,no,no,no,no,no,no,no,no" on and on and on. So I settled down and read the first page and was able to collect my thoughts about how I felt about this change.
I've been reading *Emigre* since issue Nº15. "Can you read me?" My wife, then my girlfriend, brought it home cuz it looked cool (she is not a designer but has amazing taste). Anyhow, I continued to buy Emigre

because of its odd format and because of the large amount of visuals absent from most design magazines. Images that were radical, that are design and fine art wrapped together, amazing posters, fonts that were unlike anything I'd ever seen! In short, I really love Emigre. You and Bruce Licher have been great sources of inspiration to me.
So, as you say, all the "reasons" for changing your format are mundane. I for one wouldn't mind paying more for an issue (as long as I don't have to sift through all those annoying paper samples and adverts that *HOW* has). And the size complications are moot. As long as there are other magazines of extreme proportions, e.g., *Interview*, *Artpapers*, *Metropolis*, the newsstands will accommodate yours as well.
Which leads me to my final comment: the large format of *Emigre* is ideal for a magazine that is a visual forum for graphics. Interesting page layouts can really spread out and overtake my visual space. With the last few issues you seem to be more concerned with arguments in the design community rather than promoting radical design and designing yourself. Why all this attention to Steven Heller? I see him as part of a design world much removed from my own. How about more fringe design, 'zines and true alternative music? Well, that is up to you. You are changing your focus to be more of a written forum, and that is sad.
I hope you do not stop providing posters and releasing new music (where are the fonts and cds in this issue?). I am not saying that I am canceling my subscription but I am on guard. Will *Emigre* become another visually boring treatise on design? I hope not; we already have *Comm Arts* and *Design Issues* for that purpose.
Well, there is much more to say and think about, but this will suffice for now. I enjoy the aspects of e-mail and the Now Serving BBS so that these thoughts can be sent off quick (no more looking for stamps). And I'm sure you have made a tough choice. Good luck.
c.topher d. smith
smitty@world.std.com (Now Serving)

Dear Emigre,
Issue 33 arrived with a whimper and is going out with a bang. I don't think my customers could find it at first!
"Is this the only issue they are going to do like this?" "I've got a small apartment, so I like the smaller size." "Where is the new issue of *Emigre*, I can't find it."
Above are sample comments from customers, chosen at random by yours truly to give you an idea of the enormous impact of the new format on my discriminating clientele.
Best wishes,
B. Davies, Untitled, New York (Now Serving)

Dear Emigre,
I haven't gotten Nº33 as yet, but I read a letter posted by c.topher d. smith. That letter has sent a shock wave down to my feet. Good God, Rudy! What are we in for? I'm anticipating the worst. Should I expect the worst? I hope not. I've gotta get outta here and check the mail at home.
I hope I don't cry when I see it.
Concerned,
David Brown (America Online)

Dear Emigre,
A few days ago, while on an excursion to Sacramento with my wife, I was able to slip away and visit your office. Although it isn't really a retail set-up, Tim was nice enough to let me nose around, purchase a font, a CD sampler, the Bauhaus book, and let me peruse your stack of *Emigre* back issues (none earlier than issue 20). Though intrigued by most of what you do, and a big fan of your design work (so far), I wanted to read some of your articles before subscribing. I'm generally wary of theoretical magazines (magazines that concern theory, not magazines that only exist in theory), if for no other reason than they are usually a very dry read (boring). After leafing through some issues, I was compelled to buy the issue devoted to Designers Republic, and by kind of a flip of the coin, I also picked up issue number 32.
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a pale call to action. He finds it profound to explore rather mundane observations ("...the white man's fascination with the non-white's fascination with the fascination of the non-white's fascination with the whiteness of the whale..." [sorry Herman]). And, ironically, it seems like news to Mr. Blauvelt that a large portion of the *Dallas* audience watched it for the camp humor. Is this some kind of revelation? Yikes! Somebody needs to unlock the door to his ivory tower and let in some air.

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In "War is Hell" (as I think I understand it), Heller attributes the on-going "small war" in the design press to the recalcitrance of a few old Moderns to admitting that the kids are all right, and that this has caused the kids, particularly those young tomatoes nurtured in the "academic hothouses," to think that there may in fact be differences or discontinuities between historical design and contemporary design, between the Modern and the post-modern, and therefore to experience an unfortunate detachment from the Modern. Heller says "Modernism is a casualty of this war

that must be cared for." He refers to Modernism as a "venerable ethic" which operates identically in both historical and contemporary work, and which should be regarded not as history, but as a set of timeless guidelines for practice. My position, which respects the history of the Moderns (I open my essay with a quote from El Lissitzky, for gosh sakes) but questions the way that Modernism has been *mythologized*, is interpreted by Heller as disdainful of the ethics of Modernism, a contribution to the generational factionalism that he deplores.

After sneering at my words as "critical exaggeration" he goes on, for two paragraphs, to reiterate the very same points that I have used to create my argument – that Modernism "was fraught with contradiction from the outset." He also says "Modernism was introduced to Americans as a bridge between art and commerce; a tool in the retooling of the American economy...Although pure utopianism was removed from Modernism...the symbolism of social change remained fixed." At this point in his essay, I don't understand why it is O.K. for Heller to say this, but not me; but the answer becomes clear as he goes on to make his classic mistake of confusing the philosophy and intentions of Modernism with the use of Modernist style. Suddenly, he equates rebelling "against stodgy convention" through stylistic innovation with the earlier, broadly utopian program of the Modernist avant-garde. Heller conflates the use of theory with the use of form (or the use of philosophies with the use of visual theories): he doesn't care about the details as long as we recognize that we are all in debt to Paul Rand for "the real legacy of Modernism," which he then defines as the power to bring the image of the new (and a personal imprimatur) to the world of commercial art. Heller knows very well that this process had been evolving for several years before Mr. Rand realized his particular vision, but the complexities of history are enthusiastically sacrificed to bolster the glory of our Modernist forefathers. (I do not think that it takes away from Mr. Rand to admit that he worked brilliantly *within his time*; to attribute the "legacy of Modernism" to him and him alone may be an admirable example of loyalty, but a rotten example of history.)

After all that, Heller returns to the theme of the tenuousness between the Modernist ideals versus what was actually accomplished (yes, yes...) but again falls back on the confusion of philosophy and style. He tries to deny the differences between historical and contemporary work by tracing examples of stylistic similarity (such as complex typography or layered imagery). He likens the "big idea" work of the 1950's to the language-theory-based typography of today. He assumes that style is everything, and that contemporary designers are somehow refusing to acknowledge their "legacy" (and of course he is implying that the current work is not as original as the

earlier work, i.e., not as good!) Again, I am mystified by Heller-the-historian's stance: the stylistic elements used by these two different groups of designers might look similar, but he has to know that they emerge from very different points of view, even if he doesn't like what those contemporary points of view represent. As someone who is really interested in both current and historical work, I'm not about to advocate the past over the future, nor am I going to take up more space in this letter discussing the value of either set of visual products against the original intentions of their creators. That is what part of a serious discussion around design history could include. Instead, Heller, perhaps misunderstanding his role as an advocate for design history, tries to convince contemporary designers that since their work kind of looks like Modern work of the past, they should pledge allegiance to all it stood for, though he admits that whatever it stood for is somewhat fuzzy (but it sure looked good!).

Finally, after all that confusion, Heller declares that "Modernism ran out of steam over a decade ago" and yet he goes on to repeat his canard about the ethic of Modernism continuing to inform all contemporary work; though he has kind of told us that only the style was put into practice, he keeps insisting on a sentimental attachment to the ideal of a Modernist ethic.

In "On Overcoming Modernism" (which, while I must thank Heller for re-publishing in *Looking Closer*, I wish he had read more carefully), I suggested that the complex set of cultural and social conditions that most of us recognize as "context" have shifted far in the last twenty-five years or so, and that most other fields of social and cultural endeavor tend to recognize them as post-modern, not just to be mean or to make their elders mad, but as a response to the significance of that contextual change. The discourse in the academic hothouses that some find so irritating is simply an attempt to try to understand these changes. In graphic design, examples of issues that are identifiably post-modern can be found in the area of multiplicity (of audiences, of points of view, of markets, "platforms," etc., etc.). There are other sets of issues connected to the de-centering of technology and modes of production. There's a lot to think and talk about, and center work around, inside *and* outside of the academies. But I do feel that it is so intellectually corrupt (and misleading to young designers) to tie the design "values" of social responsibility and function *exclusively* to Modernism, or, for that matter, to attribute "anti-values" of hedonism and uselessness as *exclusive* to post-modernism. After all, social responsibility and function may be observed through some design artifacts produced before 1850 and after 1968! And there's progressive Modernism and there's oppressive Modernism and beauty and uglyness all over the place.

Heller and those who think like him keep confusing history with religion. It is such a dubious assertion that Modernism presented a coherent ethic at all! Sure, there are some moments, movements, manifestos and particular works that sought to connect ethics with design, and those are worthy of our continuing admiration and study, but there are other aspects of Modernism that are "value-free" (take, for instance, rationalism: both very good and *very bad* things emanated from that little corner of the canon!). This seems so basic that it's almost embarrassing to write, but hey, this is the wonderful world of graphic design "criticism" where mythology repeats and repeats itself with all of the energetic thoughtfulness of flying toasters on a screen-saver.

There are serious conditions affecting the graphic design profession which have brought on this debilitating "small war" (which is small, in relation to the big wide world - but who shot first?) It is inter-generational only on the surface: it is really symptomatic of the insecurity of the profession in the face of the post-modern changes that contradict the conventional status of the graphic designer, and which show no current signs of disappearing. The legacy of Modernism is not simply the "realm of authored visual communications" delivered to us by one unfettered genius: it is the web of mass communication, philosophy and aesthetics, technological shifts, market economics, visual innovation, and the desires of clients, designers, and audiences that have gotten us where we are. Modern history and the post-modern present share the "complexity and contradiction" between what was or is intended or hoped for versus what was or is actually accomplished, *good and bad*. It's a simplistic joke to declare that "Modernism ran out of steam" *when one of the delights of the post-modern condition is that we get to experience Modernism and post-modernism simultaneously!* But that simultaneousness is very different from Heller's attempt to "reconcile the similarities," which only ends up creating one big authoritatively-expressed ball of confusion. And who does that serve? (The one idea that consistently emerges from his confusion: that the present doesn't measure up to the glorious past!) Does Heller really think this? Who knows? Are the endless contradictions in his own writing artifacts of the post-modern? Must his every thought appear in print? I'm hoping that *Emigre*'s shrinking page size will inspire more rigorous editing and spare us this useless "discourse."

Yours from a hothouse,
Lorraine Wild, ReVerb:, Los Angeles, Calif.

Mail

Introduction

"What we need is more radical, cutting edge design and less talk." This has become the recurring criticism of *Emigre* ever since we have shifted our focus from interviewing and showing the work of individual designers to a more reflective approach which, among other things, questions exactly how "radical" the work we've shown over the past years really is.

Although this new approach of looking at design requires a slightly longer attention span from the reader, I believe the ideas and opinions expressed are no less radical than the work discussed, and are well worth your time.

Actually, as we've moved into this new direction, I feel like I have stumbled right smack into the middle of a small revolution that has been brewing for quite some time and is probably one of the most exciting new developments within graphic design today.

Check out the three recent issues of *Visible Language*, edited by Andrew Blauvelt and designed and published by RISD, featuring insightful articles by Ellen Lupton/J. Abbott Miller, Frances Butler and Marilyn Crafton Smith. Or American Center for Design's *Statements*, Steven Heller's *AIGA Journal* and his recently published book of critical writings on graphic design *Looking Closer*, Rick Poynor's *Eye* magazine, Victor Margolin's *Design Issues*, Michael Rock's column in *I.D.* magazine, Robin Kinross' book *Fellow readers*, Dan Friedman's *Radical Modernism* and the Jan van Eyck Academy's publication "*And justice for all...*

Mainstream design magazines like *HOW*, too, are now publishing articles that go beyond the usual practical tips for the professional designer, like Kathy McCoy's GRAPHIC DESIGN IN A MULTICULTURAL WORLD, in the recent April issue.

Despite the continuing apocalyptic sloganeering by some designers who are forecasting the Death of Typography, Death of Text, Design is Dead, End of the Word, Death of the Book, and the End of Print, I'm experiencing something quite the opposite. By delving into this recent offering of writing on design, and the new insights these writers and critics provide, it feels more like we're experiencing the Rebirth of Design.

Rudy VanderLans

RADICAL COMMODITIES

BY RUDY VANDERLANS

The other day, I was reading an article about the Bauhaus by Dietmar Winkler. In it Winkler suggests that the Bauhaus legend is largely based upon myth that has obscured many truths about the Bauhaus. For instance, many of the Bauhaus ideologies, he says, originated at other schools or movements, such as the Constructivists, Futurists and De Stijl. He also points out the enormous gap that existed between the Bauhaus ideologies and the public, resulting in the design of products equally remote from the public's needs and uses. Summing it all up, Winkler writes that **"When Hannes Meyer replaced Gropius as a director of the school, his critical assessment was that its reputation outstripped manifold the quality of the work produced. He attributed this to the unparalleled public relations effort."** [1]

I don't know whether this is a correct assessment or not, but what struck me about this article was how much Winkler's observations regarding the Bauhaus myth could, to an extent, be said of Emigre as well. First of all, on more than one occasion, Emigre has received credit (or blame) for what were essentially the ideas of others whose work we published in our magazine. Secondly, like the Bauhaus, we are also ferocious promoters

1.
Dietmar Winkler,
MORALITY AND MYTH:
THE BAUHAUS REASSESSED,
Looking Closer:
Critical Writings on
Graphic Design
New York: Allworth Press,
1994, p.40.

Putch Tu

In the early 1980s, I moved to San Francisco, a place I'd been dreaming of since I was eight. This was after working for a short time in beautiful, postnuclear downtown Detroit, and after a stint in Dallas, which was, at the time, the murder capital of the US. When my friend Wild Bill (thusly named because he isn't) and I landed, it was very late at night, so we stopped at the only place open at three in the morning, a Vietnamese noodle bar on Broadway. It was a time when the Haight was becoming yuppified, when the Silicon Valley was burgeoning, when I picked up one of the first issues of *Emigre*. Back then, *Emigre* had an interesting mix of literature (an excerpt of JG Ballard's Crash, I think), poetry, art, and was not yet a tool of the design cognoscenti. There were five Michaels who seemed to rule the elitist and provincial design world, and the saying went, if you shook any tree, four designers would fall out.

FROM TECHNOLOGY TO COMMODITY.
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?:
Young designers
and the contemporary state of
graphic design

BY

Matt Owens

Digital technologies are a fixture within graphic design and have redefined the very shape of the profession. The whole history and development of typographic conventions can now be broken with the click of a mouse, and this digital revolution has resulted in a visual renaissance unequaled in graphic design history. Simultaneously, the accessibility of the personal computer has thrown design into mediocrity—with the right software and a scanner, anyone can become a graphic designer. These technological developments have

of our work. Whether it overshadows the quality of the work we produce is arguable, but what I do know is that without a focused public relations effort, Emigre would simply not exist. And perhaps the Bauhaus might not have existed either. Promoting our work, making our work public, in any way we can, is simply an inevitable necessity when publishing a magazine and selling typefaces for a living.

I've always been intrigued by the commercial aspects of publishing. I remember ten years ago when we started *Emigre* magazine, the one publication I was looking at a lot was *RAW* magazine. Although I was drawn to the work of Gary Panther, Charles Burns, Sue Coe, Joost Swarte and a host of others, and was moved by the subversive content of the work, I was even more curious to find out how *RAW* was made possible. I once visited Art Spiegelman and Francoise Mouly, the publishers, in their studio in New York, and I remember looking at all this socio-
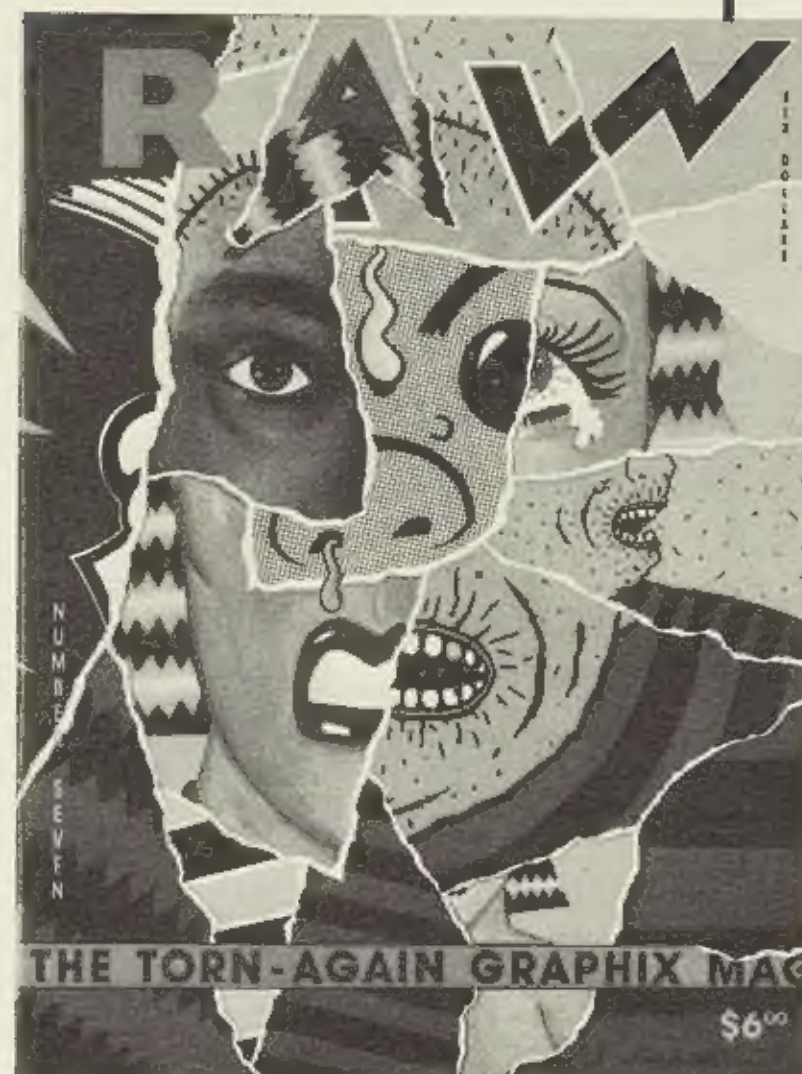
Cover *RAW* magazine.
Design by Art Spiegelman (1985).

That's when I began my multiple lives: a well-groomed, hopefully fashionable, wealth-and-status seeking designer during the day, hangin' at the Zeitgeist for relief at night, going to the Santa Cruz mountains to play with the intelligentsia from Berkeley and UCSC during the weekends. Most of the latter were fascist, vegetarian-practicing, pagans who were a little too in touch with their inner children for my comfort, but then, the lunatic fringe came as a welcomed relief from the daily burden of makin' pretty pictures for the Man.

Spirit of the Times: Hangin' at the Zeitgeist

The Zeitgeist was a punk-C&W-(country and western) biker-bar tucked under an on-ramp of a freeway, somewhere near lower Hayes Valley and Market. It was as real a postmodern hybrid as it was dangerous; black

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

both widened and jeopardized the field as we know it. So the question arises: to what extent? At present, the continual search for new visual languages through technology has degenerated into easily appropriated formal concerns. In both the academy and the workplace, the question, "How did you do that?" has replaced notions of concept and intent. For young designers weaned on Photoshop filters and Illustrator outlines, pushing the boundaries of text and image is an expected pursuit. These experiments in graphic form, divorced from

conceptual value and substantive content, can only rest for so long on the laurels of technology.
In this world of staggering visual possibility, where do young designers look to bridge the gap between the conceptual and the digital? In his article BEEN THERE, SEEN THAT, DOING IT TOMORROW, Rick Poynor remarks that David Carson's embrace of corporate advertising serves "merely to conspire in and speed up the commodification of his own design process."[1] This commodification is a direct consequence of the way we have

1.
Rick Poynor,
BEEN THERE, SEEN THAT,
DOING IT TOMORROW,
Frieze, no. 18,
Sept.-Oct. 1994, p.5.

[05]

politically critical work, yet I couldn't help but be fascinated with how they managed to get it published. How do you finance this? How do you find an audience? How do you distribute it? It's one thing to have so many illustrators creating important work, but if you can't share it with an audience, that's a missed opportunity.

This entrepreneurial element, which is crucial to the existence of any subculture, avant-garde or underground work, is largely overlooked when assessing the work, because to most people, whenever the commercial aspects become prominent, it somehow taints the work and renders it less pure or authentic. Yet it's difficult to imagine how any movement can operate without a concentrated effort to make money.

For instance, it's difficult to see how the Sex Pistols would have been formed if it weren't for art-school student/entrepreneur Malcolm McLaren, who provided them with a place to practice and a monthly allowance. There was a reason he did this. To McLaren the Sex Pistols were initially a means to promote his clothing shop, called "Sex." although punk was bound to happen because it was symptomatic of what was going on within British culture, without the Sex Pistols, it would not have been the same.

Grunge, a more recent subcultural movement of alternative music, didn't coalesce until 1986, when Bruce Pavitt (with money borrowed from his dad) released *SubPop 100*, an lp featuring a number of Seattle-based bands. Out of the success of this release grew Sub-Pop records, the label that eventually would put out the first Nirvana album, making Sub-

leather and shaved head posturing was more than a fashion statement at the Zeitgeist. Now, the ostensibly masculinist-reeking place would at first glance seem to be antithetical to my interests, but in fact I found a great deal of comfort in its atmosphere, and was taken with the sass represented by its logo. Spray-painted onto the anonymous side of the blackened outside wall was a skull with Playboy bunny ears and bow tie.

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

That was the first thing I thought of as I thumbed through *Dan Friedman: Radical Modernism* - escaping to the comfort of the Zeitgeist. Dan Friedman's book is a tome for mainstream graphic designers, a $65 commodity fetish created to adorn the well-considered coffee table. It's an odd concatenation of personal photo album and travelogue, a portfolio of his and his students' work, images from other artists (ostensibly included to make some point or another), images of indigenous peoples, and images of his trendy, artsy house—life as art, apparently. A bit like a retrospective, the book includes essays by Friedman, which are opinions proffered, but

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

come to *accept* digital form-giving as only an aesthetic device—stripped of its communicative potential. The digital is seen merely as way of making things *look*, not a way of communicating. Poynor himself is contributing to the commodification of design. His books, *Typography Now* and *The Graphic Edge*, while providing designers with a glimpse at contemporary work within the field, relinquish the communicative understanding of graphic design pieces to the three-sentence caption and the reproduction picture window. This showcasing promotes,

even celebrates, the separation of what we perceive from what we understand about developments within contemporary graphic design. How, then, does this formalist slant help a young designer realize his/her place within the future of the field? Must I commit creative suicide at the hands of corporate advertising to have any value within culture? Is my only power as a communicator the marketability of my own visual language? These issues weigh heavily on the minds of young designers who feel comfortable with digital technology as a means of

2.
Jameson touches on this separation between the conceptual and the visual with regard to the spoken word; "Again, in normal speech, we try to see through the materiality of words (their strange sounds and printed appearance, my voice timbre and peculiar accent, and so forth) towards their meaning. As meaning is lost, the materiality of words becomes obsessive, as is the case when children repeat a word over and over again until its sense is lost and it becomes an incomprehensible incantation. To begin to link up with our earlier description, a signifier that has lost its signified has thereby been transformed into an image."
Fredric Jameson,
POSTMODERNISM AND A
CONSUMER SOCIETY,
The Anti-aesthetic:
Essays on Postmodern Culture,
Seattle: Bay Press,
1983, p.120.

[06]

Pop one of the most celebrated independent record labels in the United States and subsequently launching the careers of a number of musical innovators.

Hip-hop and Rap, too, were given a great boost and credibility when Rick Rubin, a Jewish kid from suburban Long Island who studied film at NYU, together with Russell Simmons, a shrewd entrepreneur, started the record company Def Jam. Although the musical inventiveness of Hip-hop came straight from the streets, the explosion of Hip-hop culture probably would not have happened without a company like Def Jam providing the means to make the music available to a wide audience.

What attracts me most about these above-mentioned entrepreneurs is how they accommodate the production and distribution of authentic creative work by individuals and how they create alternative options for these individuals to learn and share skills, earn a living and express themselves within society. The added bonus is often that in the process, they also help expand and sometimes even change what society as a whole considers important.

It was during this time in the early eighties, against this background of post Punk, Hip-hop and Grunge do-it-yourself entrepreneurship that we launched *Emigre* magazine. Just as the recording and production of music had become entirely demystified and democratized in the eighties with the availability of cheap and easy to use recording equipment, in 1984, graphic design, too, was handed a tool that would make it possible for in-

not legitimized, by bothersome footnotes. But legitimization is nicely covered by the other men who wrote short essays in praise of Dan; obviously, the man has a good pedigree of friends who should convince us. But what made me long for the Zeitgeist were the omnipresent images of Friedman's bald pate, along with a photo of him in a black leather jacket, white Playboy bunny heads marching around its shoulders. The juxtaposition of these images with the Zeitgeist's logo made my teeth hurt, as if I chewed on aluminum foil.

HANGIN AT THE ZEITGEIST

What the hell is it about designers I always wonder, that makes my teeth hurt? What's with the inability to develop much discourse beyond the rhetoric of fashion magazines, or to understand critical thinking as something beyond the trendiest "next thing"? Why is it that we are always so far behind other disciplines? Why is our intelligentsia so undereducated, the discourse of design is so vapid and myopic? Is it modernist? Is it postmodernist? Is it a radical rethinking?

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

articulation and expression.[2] When we look for insight into these issues, cultural critics tell us that this commodifying trend is symptomatic of a larger societal phenomenon indicative of late capitalism. As Terry Eagleton states with regard to ideology and the condition of non-meaning in contemporary culture: "The sway of utility and technology bleach social life of significance, subordinating use value to the empty formalism of exchange value. Consumerism bypasses meaning in order to engage the subject subliminally, libidinally, at the level of visceral response rather than reflective consciousness. In this sphere, as in the realms of media and everyday culture, form overwhelms content, signifiers lord it over signifieds, to deliver us the blank affectless, two dimensional surfaces of a post-modernist social order."[3] In this view, any cultural development only exists long enough for the valuable nuances of that development to be incorporated into the larger mass culture. The blurred boundaries between design, advertising, and entertainment in

3. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction.* London: Verso, 1991, p 39

[07]

Sports Illustrated

Eye to Eye

See you and the Magic
in the Finals

Reggie Miller: Mr. Hot Shot •

Isiah Thomas's Canadian Club • Where Have All the **Shooters** Gone?•

Sports Illustrated cover
featuring P. Scott Makela's
Dead History and Zuzana
Licko's Matrix Script Bold
typefaces (1994).

• Scouting Reports: Can the **Houston Rockets** Repeat? •

today's marketplace have made this consumption and redigestion of image even more pronounced. As a result, many graphic designers suffer from creative "pastiche" as their visual languages become recognized and mimicked by advertisers, corporations, and other graphic designers. When the typefaces of Scott Makela, Zuzana Licko, Jeff Keedy and other supposed type renegades are used to sell anything from Sports Illustrated to Kellog's Corn Flakes, we recognize that terms like experimental and radical as applied to them are essentially irrelevant

As the novelty of digital graphic manipulations continues to be a valuable commodity in the marketplace, many young designers feel they have nowhere else to turn but to corporate advertising to make a living At the heart of this phenomenon remains the designer's role in the client-designer relationship. The subjectivity and idiosyncrasy inherent in design approaches today (especially those fostered in Academia) runs counter to the traditional ideas of the designer's role as an empirical

dividual designers to become self-sufficient. In Emigre's case, instead of peddling our services, it became clear that with the help of the computer, we could focus our attention on producing our own products: a magazine and a series of digital typefaces (the latter the result of experiments with low resolution output devices).

It was an extremely exciting and opportune time centered around this new emerging technology. *Emigre* magazine quickly became a kind of magnet for many like-minded individuals who were going through the same process of discovery and assimilation of using a computer with which to design.

It was during this time, also, that I started noticing the work coming out of Cranbrook and later CalArts. I never felt an affinity for the theoretical underpinnings that informed some of the work coming out of Cranbrook. What I did recognize, though, was a common interest in the Macintosh, a curiosity to question typographic traditions and, more importantly, the need to create work that allowed room for the designer's voice. Instead of buying into the fabricated singular narrative of modernism that would lead us all to an imagined better world, these designers were dealing with the world as it really was; fragmented, ironic, chaotic, humorous, ambiguous, and with room for many individual voices to be heard.

Just as the music of Punk was a direct response to the corporate glitter and glam rock of musicians such as David Bowie and Brian Ferry, I saw the work created at Cranbrook and

Only his hairdresser knows for sure

Now, the very posing of the questions themselves can provide a bit of a diagnostic tool for unscrewing what is going on here. The discourse about modernism is by now fairly well and meaningfully developed by other disciplines, but we can't seem to get a grip on it. Friedman's book, for example, represents one genre of design publication purporting to have something to say about modernism. It is titled fairly enough, indicating that this is a book of one individual's opinion, scattered through several essays, amid a plethora of four-color photos. He seems to get a lot right: design as it is practiced through the professional realm is problematic for a complex number of reasons, and he presents us with his idea for one solution. A reasoned and responsible approach. He names and defines his solution, "radical modernism," as "a reaffirmation of the idealistic roots of modernity, adjusted to include more of our diverse culture, history, research, and fantasy." While his optimism is laudable, his arguments and methods of reaching his conclusions are often maddening.

problem solver. The modernist notion of seamless communication through visual language is merely an ideological construct. Designers are not universal arbiters of information, nor do clients possess almighty knowledge concerning success and failure. As a consequence, the responsibilities of the graphic designer become more inclusive. If, indeed, our world is a rich tapestry of societal, economic and cultural interplay, then designers must position themselves as an integral part of it.
Marilyn Crafton Smith discusses this reconception of graphic design as a cultural practice by positing a model for cultural production. Unlike the traditional communication model of sender/message/receiver, examining communications through the notion of cultural production would shift the designer's role from a focus on empirical communication to that of social meaning. Smith states; "assessing the specific conditions under which messages are transformed and given meaning provides insight into the ways cultural forms are inhabited subjectively by their readers."[4]

4
Marilyn Crafton Smith,
CULTURE IS THE LIMIT,
PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF GRAPHIC
DESIGN CRITICISM AND PRACTICE,
Visible Language,
vol. 28, no. 4,
Spring 1994, p 308

[09]
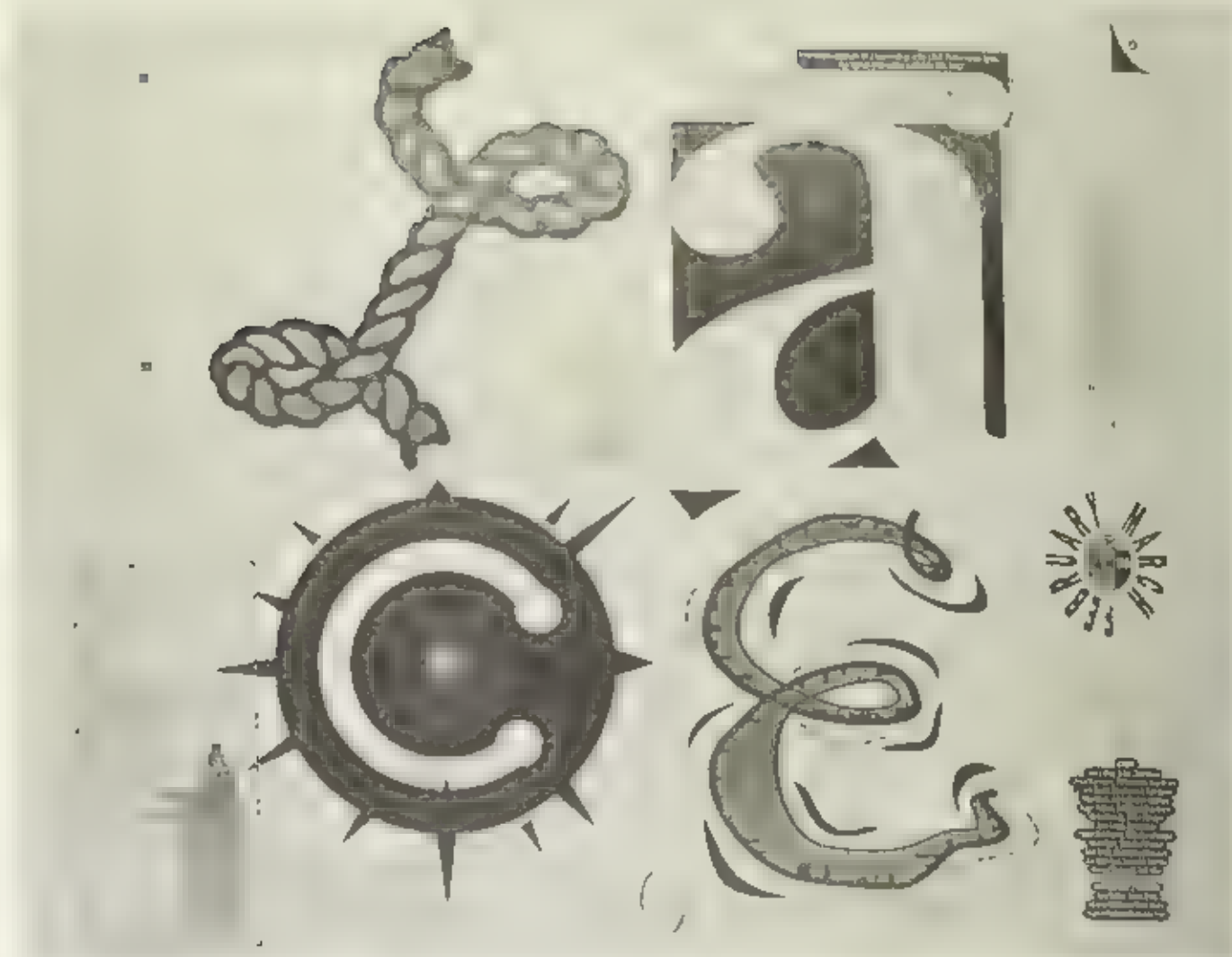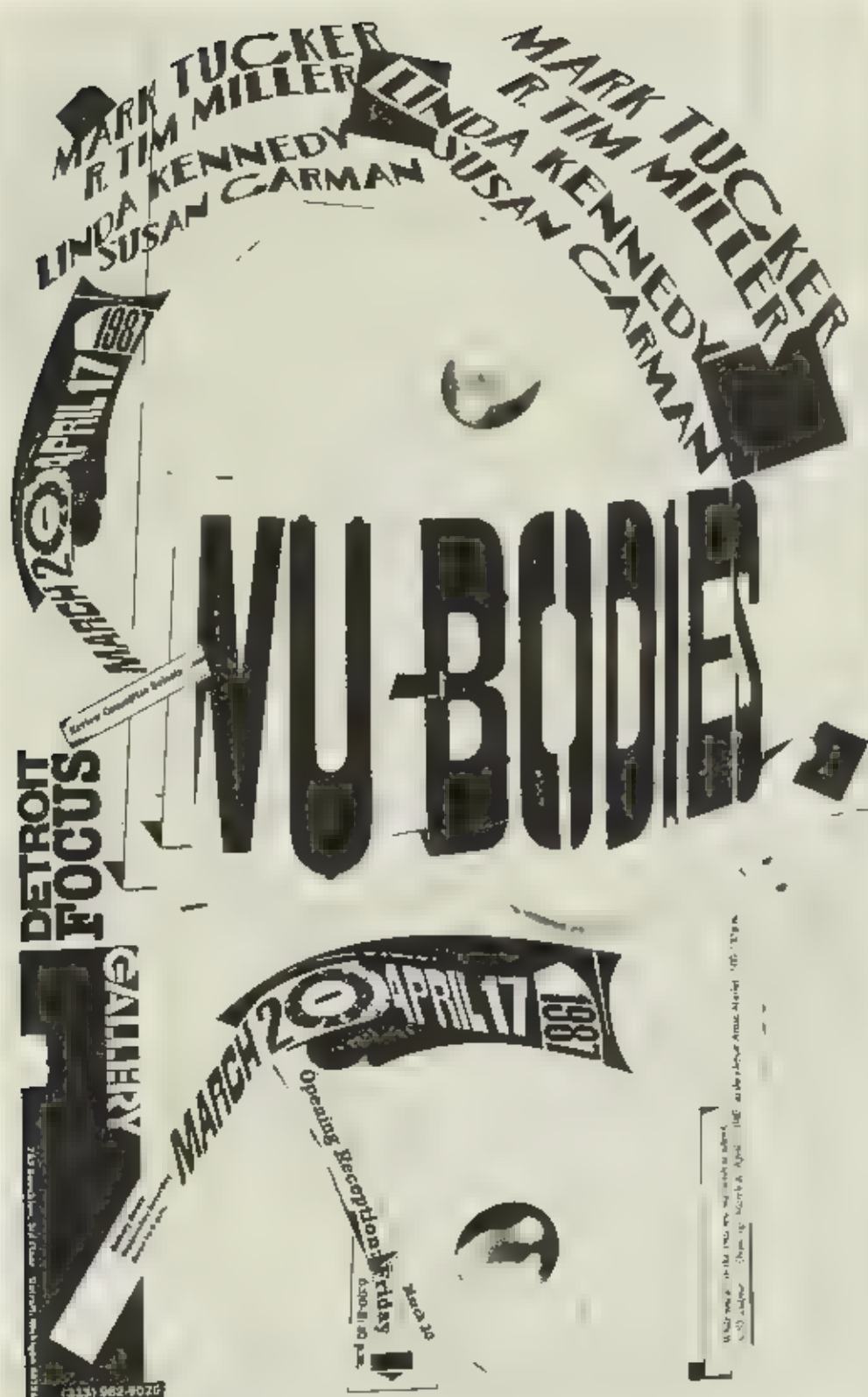
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT.
Flyer for the Detroit Artists Market designed by Edward Fella (1987)
Flyer for LACE, a Los Angeles art gallery, designed by Jeffery Keedy (1989)
Page spread from *Emigre* #12, an issue devoted to the art of pre-press and printing,
designed by Allen Hori (1989).
Back cover for a special issue of *Emigre* (#10) produced by the Cranbrook Design
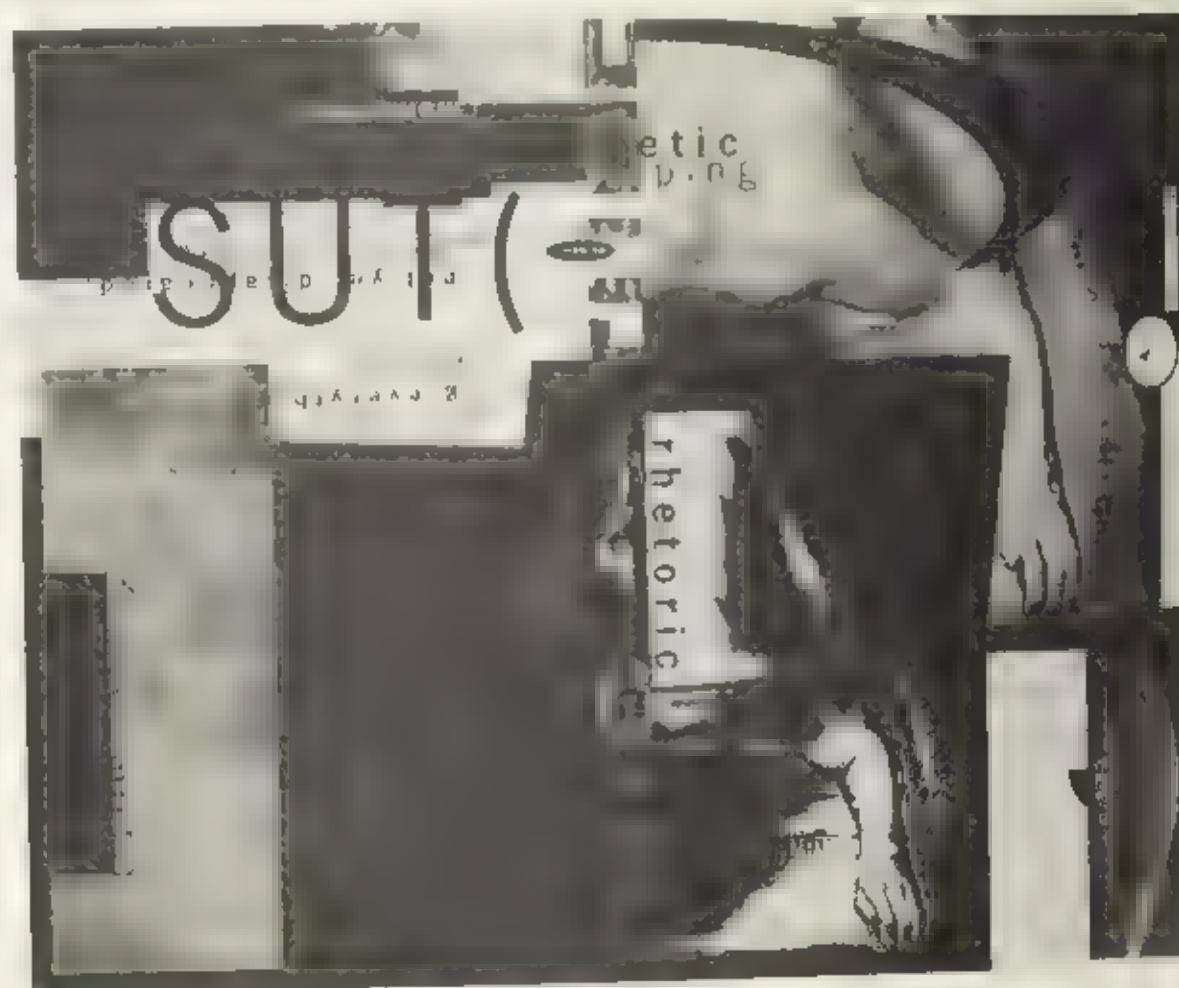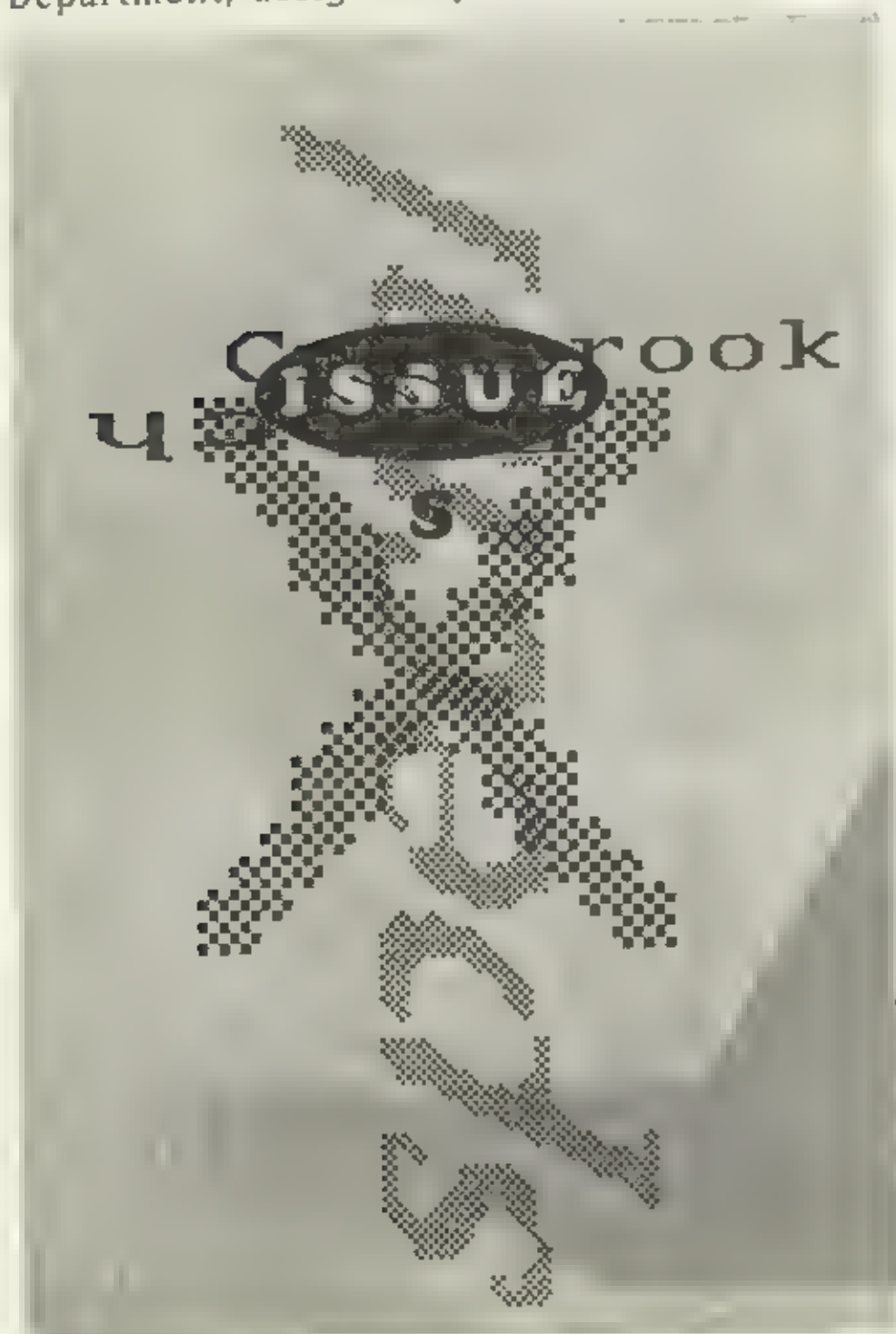Department, designed by Glenn Suokko (1988).

CalArts as a response to the slick, wasteful, corporate and somewhat elitist design methods of the 70s.

2
Interview with Mr. Keedy,
Emigre, no 17 1991

In an interview with Cranbrook graduate (and now CalArts faculty member) Ed Fella, conducted in 1991, Fella describes some of the experiments they were then involved in: **"it comes from a realization that things are just getting smarter and smarter and i feel that there's a particular conceit in that. in order to open things up again, you can't endlessly design one more legible typeface, one even more legible than the rest. So at some point you have to take that conceit away. Especially in graphic design, we're surrounded by really slick design. it's an extremely neat-handed profession. in order to break out of that, you either have to become the most facile professional of them all or chip away at it somehow. Chip away at the conceit of the slick profession that gets ever and ever tighter."**[2] In the same interview, however, Fella also stated his frustration about how difficult it had been for him to have this experimental work be accepted in a commercial market, explaining that the work was only accepted by art organizations. He thought that although the experiments were worthwhile, he seemed doubtful whether they would ever be used

There was just as much skepticism about the usefulness of the new typefaces that came out of these experiments. When we first asked Jeffery Keedy in 1990 whether he would

Word/image associations combine to form autobiographical and
cultural statements which create and question aspects of meaning in this project
created at Cranbrook by Lisa Langhoff Vorhees (1990).

Keedy Sans, in an early unfinished stage, used in a layout in *Emigre* #15 (1990).

Friedman goes further than many designers in understanding some of the complexities of discussing design and modernism, modernity, postmodernism and culture. But while he begins to approach real insight, he still seems locked into some of the problematic approaches of designers in their efforts to critically understand design. Among them are **the tendencies to define modernism in slippery terms;** to not recognize the possible and ever-illusory meaning of style and its relationship to culture; to look at design in isolation removed from a larger context; to want to stabilize and define the limits of design during a time that resists this; and to focus on issues of aesthetics and intentionality to the exclusion of larger issues of representation, ideology, and subjectivity. HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

Friedman presents us with a great deal of information about his philosophy and his work. Perhaps this is asking too much from a designer, but I also want to know how this design works, how people use or respond

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As young designers seek out avenues to cultivate their creative energies, new sensibilities discovered through technology must actively intermesh with design practice. To effectively achieve this cohesion, the vertical structure of traditional design approaches — from client to designer to audience — must be shifted to a lateral orientation — client, artifact and designer within culture — incorporating it into a broader social framework. By repositioning visual communication as a culturally indigenous pursuit, professional practice must foster both specificity and diversity. Designers must also recognize the instrumental role technology plays in the pluralization of information. Internet access, fiber-optic communication and digital voice recognition have altered the very way in which individuals communicate with one another. As a consequence, the development of interactive software, the construction of graphical browsers for the World Wide Web and other new communication opportunities become open doors through which young graphic designers can harness their abilities

[12]

3
Interview with Rudy Vanderlans
Emigre, no. 15, 1990, p.14.

let us release his typeface Keedy Sans commercially, his reaction was **"i never thought of that as a possibility. Who would want to use something this strange anyway?"** [3] The easy way to find out was by implementation. By showing these experiments in *Emigre* magazine we were able to see how these ideas and typefaces would be received by other graphic

Keedy Sans

Designed by Mr. Keedy (1989).

designers. However, the work involved in releasing typefaces commercially, and maintaining a magazine that functioned as a testing ground for such typefaces was labor-intensive and costly. Therefore it was crucial that the results were eventually going to be accepted by more than a few adventurous art directors.

This effort of selling independently produced typefaces and the acceptance of typographic experimentation by a wider audience received a tremendous push when in 1992 *Ray Gun* magazine was launched. Founded by Marvin Jarrett (*Creem, Bikini, Huh*), *Ray Gun* was published to fill a particular niche in the music magazine market. **"Ever since Nirvana brought alternative music to the masses,"** Jarrett said in an interview in *Emigre*, **"i believe there has been a need for a magazine to cover this phenomenon."** [4] As *Ray Gun* set out to bring alternative music to the masses, it did so in a visual form that would turn many heads within graphic design. The approach was a mixture of typographic experimentation, production mistakes, bootlegged typefaces, and

4
Interview with Rudy VanderLans,
Emigre, no. 24, 1992, p 19

to it, the possible and multiple ways to interpret it. Who better than Friedman, I thought, to let us in on the conditions of its production and effect within the larger socio-political economic context? Can you imagine what the guy knows about Citibank and the possible dissemination of that logo? As designers, we seldom demand of ourselves a critical *evaluation* that is not based primarily on formal concerns or our intentionality, one that incorporates multiple viewpoints and accepts a basic indeterminacy in potential meanings and insight. Okay, so maybe we'll have to wait for cultural critics to provide that, but can we at least invite them to our conferences? Along with the guys from the Zeitgeist?

Time for a New Haircut

HANGIN AT THE ZEITGEIST

Friedman's location of modernism is a good example of how designers tend to think. He begins by referencing the multiple meanings attributed to modernism by other disciplines, while he himself locates it as a guiding

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

and establish new professional paradigms in the design field. Though in its infancy, these relationships are developing in small design collectives in Europe and America. The interactive workshop of Post-Tool in San Francisco is but one example of designers working to establish methodologies that address both social specificity and new communication capabilities. With the advent of these new developments, the conceptual ability of the designer— the unique skill to develop ideas and transform them into artifact— remains our most

valuable asset. In *Morality and Myth: The Bauhaus Reassessed*, Dietmar R. Winkler asks the question: "What is the design morality or the design responsibility of the professional? Is it possible to have no discriminatory opinions about the contents, purpose, and impact of communication messages on users and consumers?" [5] These considerations redirect design responsibilities from the empirical and formal into the moral, ethical, and political. With the power to harness the codes of our social fabric, the designer's irreverent

5
Dietmar R. Winkler
MORALITY AND MYTH,
THE BAUHAUS REASSESSED,
*Looking Closer:
Critical Writings on Graphic Design*,
New York: Allworth Press.
1994, p 41

[13]

prominently positioned illustration and photography work. *Ray Gun* also thumbed its nose at conventional editorial makeup by collapsing the hierarchy of texts, headlines, subheads, decks, pullquotes and captions into a seemingly indecipherable melee. And the intended audience loved it.

The process of reading a magazine like *Ray Gun* is like deciphering a puzzle. When you decipher it, it's like being let in on a secret, and you feel like you belong to the club. You either get it or you don't; you're either cool or you're not. Here the simple idea of legibility is thrown out the door in favor of an experience — a heightened level of communication. And the notions of legibility as we know it from traditional book typography that are used to criticize this kind of work are useless, since the work has no intention of being legible in the first place.

If **"The reproduction and distribution of text is part of the life-blood of social-critical dialogue,"**[5] as the critic Robin Kinros says, then *Ray Gun* must be considered quite successful. Besides the fact that *Ray Gun* has helped set off a heated debate on legibility and typefaces within the profession of design, you have to take only one look at the letters section of *Ray Gun* to find out how this magazine is also completely dissected by its readers. Every typographic gesture, every placement of a picture, intentional or by mistake, every article, legible or not, is discussed by the readers. I believe it is the spontaneous, nonauthoritative, anti-design feel of *Ray Gun* that must ac-

5
Robin Kinross,
fellow readers,
London: Hyphen Press,
1994, p 24

principle, "an idealistic notion that was intended to be popular, hopeful, egalitarian, and applied throughout society in science, art, philosophy, literature, and design." Originally, he tells us - and this is where it gets slippery - formal concerns were "based on moral imperative, social responsibility, and intellectual rigor," but ultimately fell into "indiscriminate obsession with pure form." At the same time, an "ever widening gap between stylistic tendencies, diminished expectations, and limited substance" grew. As we increasingly confused our service to corporations with service to the public good, consumer society took over. We went to hell in a hand-basket, Friedman tells us, as the result of "the capacity of the modernist style to be assimilated by the corporation because of its restraint, neutrality, and potentially cost efficient replication." We sold out, became mere stylists, not unlike plastic surgeons or spin doctors.

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

<u>What sounds like a reasonable and carefully considered argument belies several problems that have seemingly</u>

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

habit of applying any cultural patina to satisfy the client's needs must be overcome. To do so, designers (both young and old alike) must assume a more critical slant to form-giving. As Smith suggests; "Traditionally, the design object and its form have been given primary emphasis in graphic design practice and criticism Instrumentalist notions of form, that form is a tool for the transmission of pregiven meanings, must be revised to consider the links among the content, ideological themes and the particular form a graphic design product takes Rather than relinquish form altogether, cultural studies need to recuperate it by showing its relevance to content and the production of meaning."[6] With this shift from the design object and its production to design as the cultural production of meaning, designers can no longer approach audiences as merely a "viewing eye and devouring stomach."[7] The articulation of ideas through text and image—an understanding of what is being said, how, and why—must drive graphic design practice forward to bring the formal advances technology has

6
Marilyn Crafton Smith,
CULTURE IS THE LIMIT.
PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF GRAPHIC
DESIGN CRITICISM AND PRACTICE,
Visible Language,
vol. 28 no. 4,
Spring 1994, p 315

7
Terry Eagleton,
Ideology: An Introduction,
London· Verso
1991, p 38

Two spreads from *Ray Gun* magazine. Art directed by David Carson. Top spread designed by Cranbrook graduate Martin Venezky **(1994)**.

count for the fact that so many of its readers feel quite uninhibited to write in and respond to everything from the writing to the use of the typefaces.

Ray Gun once and for all showed that the use of non-traditional typefaces and extreme typographic variations are possible within mainstream magazine publishing. Under the very gutsy art direction of David Carson, who invited various CalArts and Cranbrook graduates (including Fella) to contribute to *Ray Gun*, anti-design had finally gone Big Time. And although there are many people who like to hate *Ray Gun* and quickly dismiss it as just another stylistic fad, I think it has greatly helped to expand the notion of legibility and magazine layout. All it took for some of the experiments to become accepted was the appropriate time, the right audience and an entrepreneur like Jarrett who could pull it all together.

Ch, Ch, Ch, Changes

Punk and Hip-hop were initially not accepted as credible musical forms, so distribution systems were created from the ground up. By doing so, these innovative musical styles forever changed the music industry in every aspect. They challenged not only how music sounded but also how it was created, produced and performed, and they also significantly changed how music was distributed and sold, creating many alternative economic environments.

always plagued the discourses of design. First is the easy slide from defining modernism in broad terms to its embodiment in design as a style. The notion of style is one of our more illusory concepts, and tends to be one of our more obvious stumbling blocks. Combined with our tendency to discuss design in formalistic terms, we too easily separate form from content and from larger social, political, and economic issues, in turn isolating ourselves from the rich discourses surrounding other disciplines. HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

What seems to be problematic among designers is the relationship of theory to the practice and creation of artifacts. We seem to confuse theoretical considerations as a way to understand design with an application of them as methodologies for creation the old theory/practice bifurcation. Someone did not sit in philosophical isolation to devise the idea of modernism that would be later applied to diverse disciplines. Rather, it was a

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

provided into tune with the conceptual power of visual language.

End

Matt Owens: Matt Owens@aol.com
Cranbrook Academy of Art, Design Department: crdesign@oeonline.com

This closely resembles the exciting changes that have taken place within typeface design and manufacture in the past five to ten years. The Macintosh computer has completely democratized the design and manufacture of fonts. Before, this had been the private domain of only a handful of large type foundries who owned the proprietary systems needed to turn a typeface design into a working product. In addition, with the recent possibility of selling typefaces electronically by modem, the Macintosh can now also provide the means of distribution, one of the most difficult hurdles to clear when you self-publish.

The acceptance of magazines like *Ray Gun* by both the design establishment and mainstream audiences, coupled to the ease with which one can technically produce fonts, has sparked a tremendous activity in typeface production, and graphic designers and magazines alike have recognized that designing and selling fonts can be a viable means of income.

The resulting availability of thousands of typefaces, with dozens added each month, is proof of a completely democratized field and shows us that graphic designers have use for more than the tried and the true. Although it would be easy to find a good deal wrong with the results, I would like to focus on the positives. No longer are graphic designers dependent upon the work of an elite of traditional typeface designers who produce fonts primarily for use in text. Today, graphic designers have access to nearly as

process and phenomenon that was already occurring in Western societies, the result of society's attempt to come to terms with secularism, industrialization, the move from agrarian to urban organizations, and a reconfiguration of power and economic relations that began to emerge in the nineteenth century. It signalled an epochal shift in consciousness in response to momentous social, political, and economic orders. Philosophers and theoreticians named and characterized what already existed, took that, and pointed toward new directions of thinking and action, as did workers, artists, and the ruling class. We look to theoreticians because they can clarify very complex phenomena and perhaps point toward recommended directions of action, not because they necessarily have a messianic recipe that will endow design with shiny new attributes. When designers confuse style as somehow being equivalent to a theoretical concept, both theory and its embodiment in design suffers. Rather, each influences the other through indirect relationships. **Postmodern theory,** for example, **cannot be merely illustrated with layered or**

Zombie Modernism

It Lives!

Mr. Keedy

This is a very scary essay. It's about death and denial. But you don't have to be afraid to read it, because it's just language, and meaning is arbitrary. At least that is what those nasty postmodernists and deconstructivists want you to believe. But we know better. There is a right way and a wrong way to do everything. A good way and a bad way, a rational way and a crazy way, a clear way and a chaotic way, the modern way and the modern way. In graphic design, there is no alternative to modernism. To predate modernism is to be a commercial artist, printer or scribe, not a designer, because the designer was born out of modernism. To postdate modernism is equally incomprehensible for most designers, because...

[17]
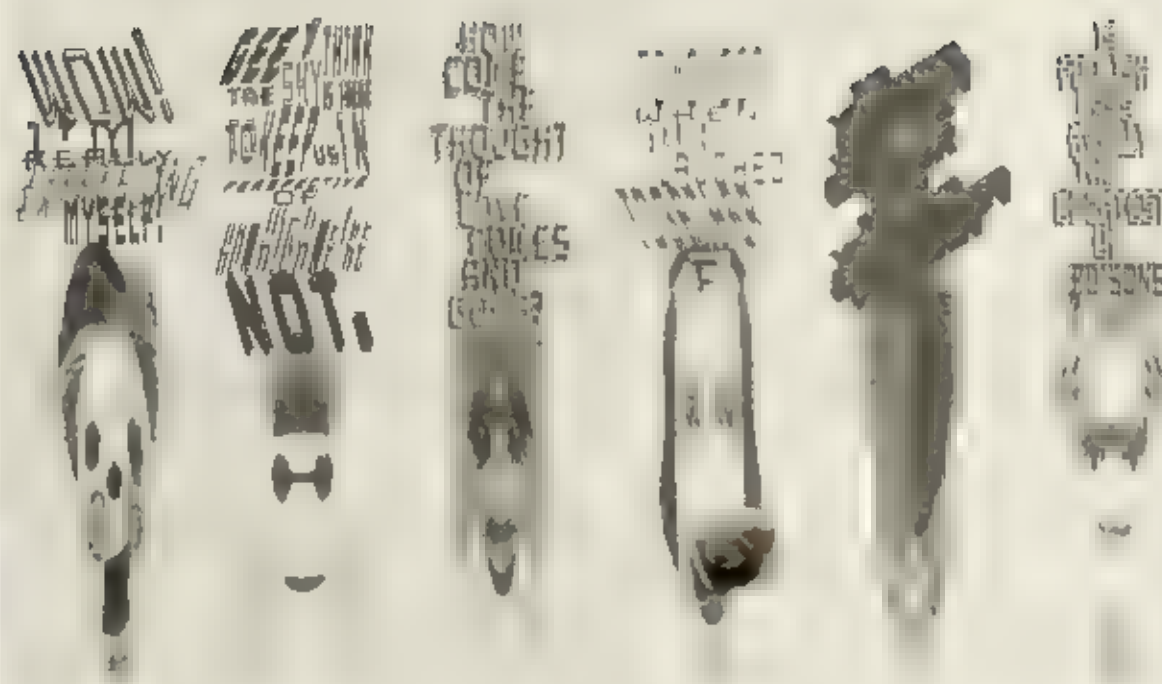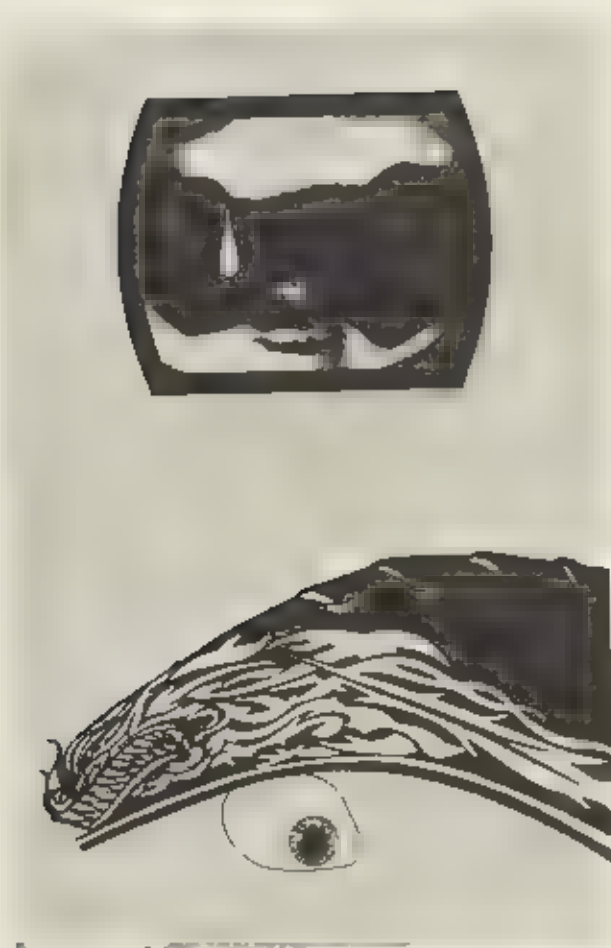
Thirstype (U.S.A.)

"Trendy font designs that art-school students drool over."

.REQUEST MAGAZINE

"THEY'RE TOASTED!"

CAKEFONTS

By Charles Anderson

For the MODERN Macintosh User!

Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber

Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber
Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber
Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber

Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber

Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber
Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber
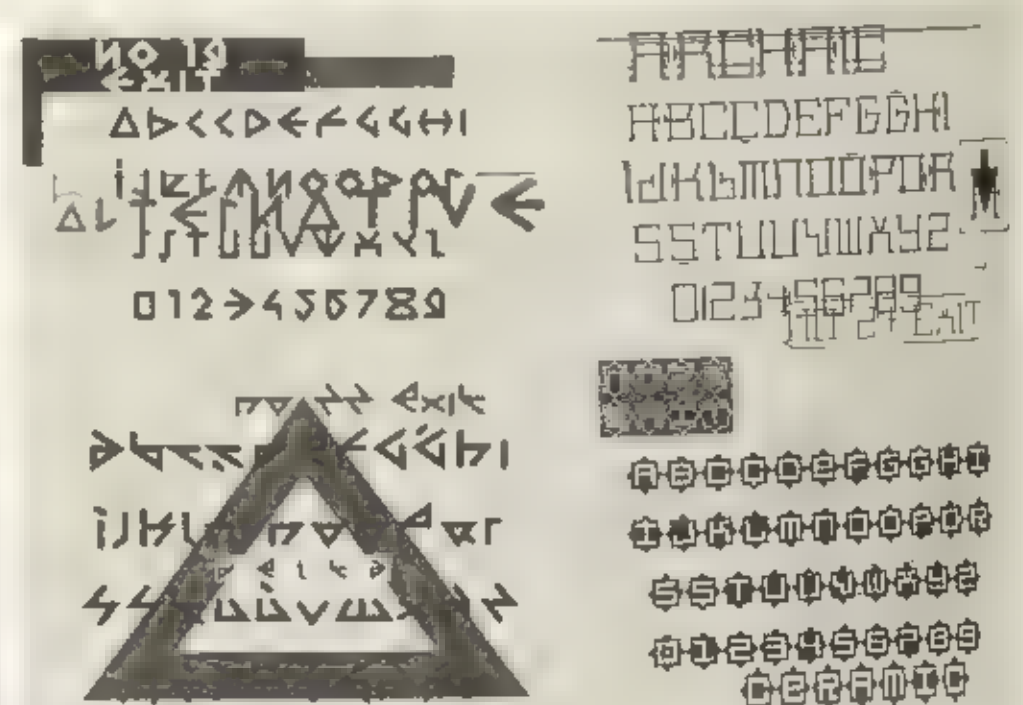Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber
Natural Bulk-Producing Dietary Fiber

Cakefonts (U.S.A.)
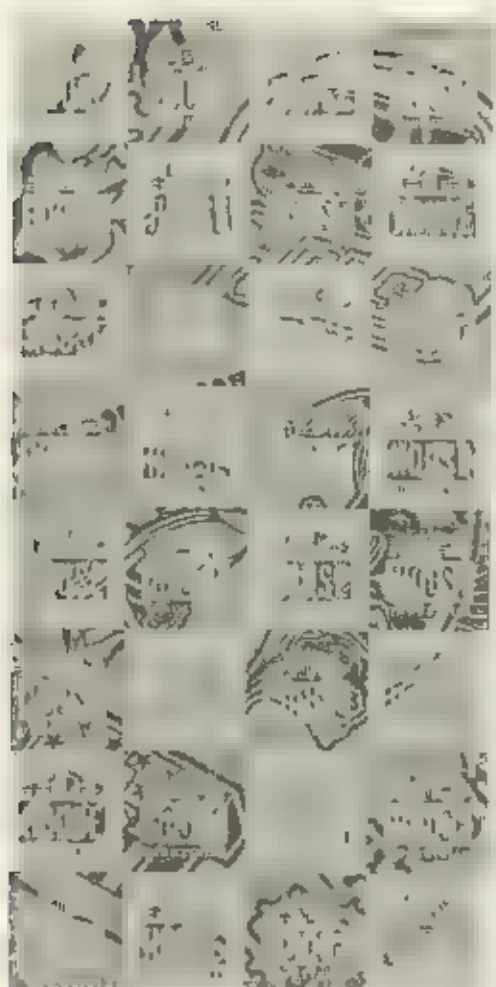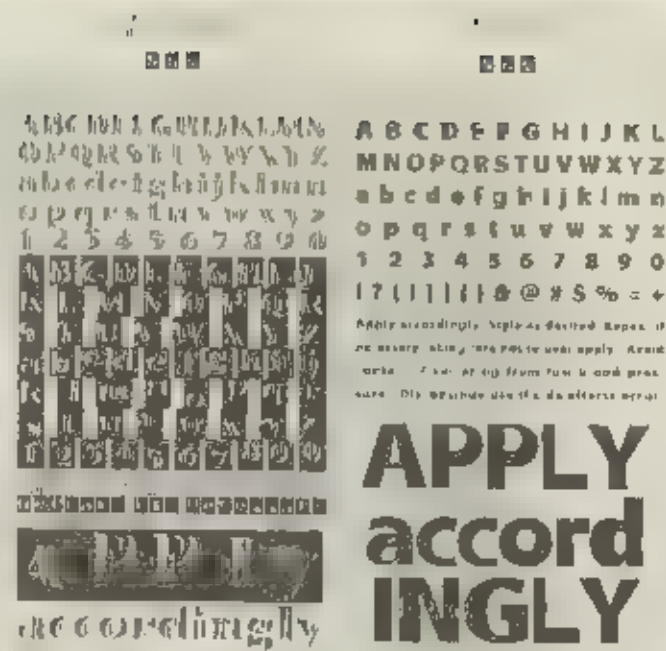

[T-26] (U.S.A.)

Exit Design Type (Turkey)

Garagefonts (U.S.A.)
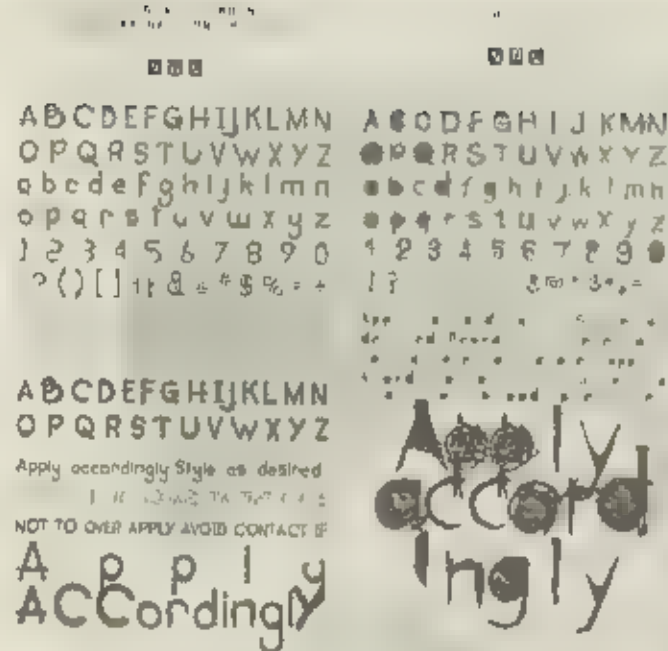
House Industries (U.S.A.)
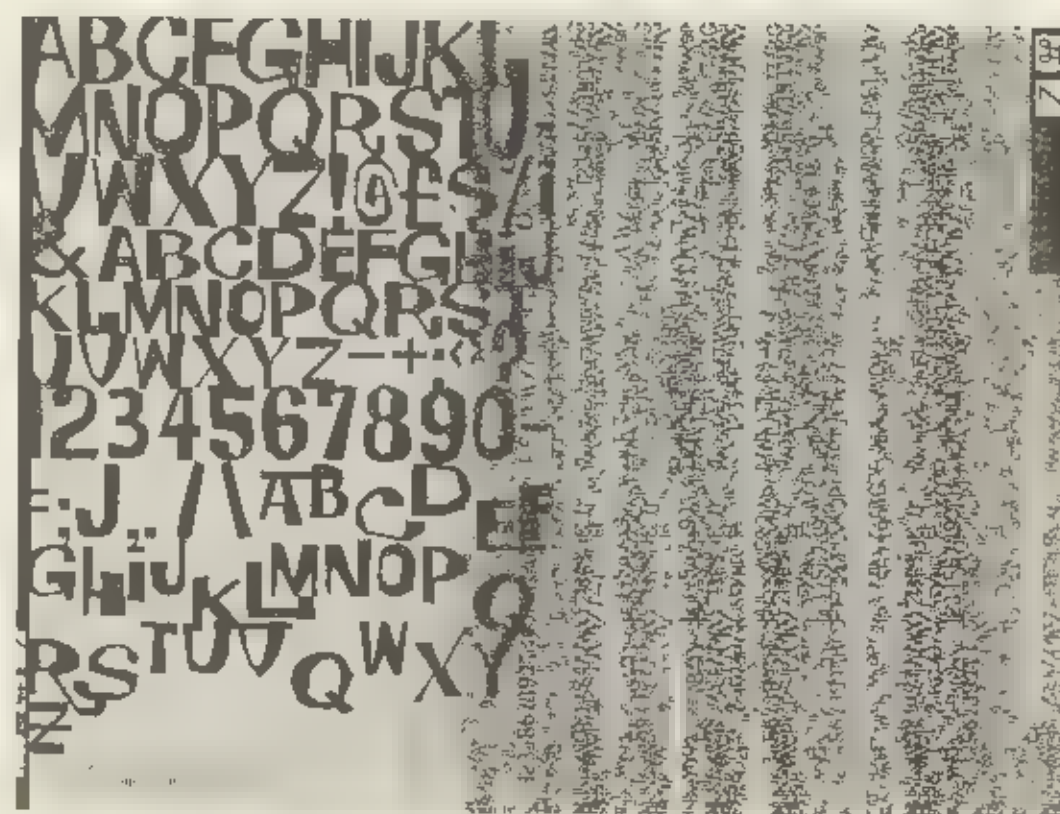
Swifty's Funky Fonts (England)
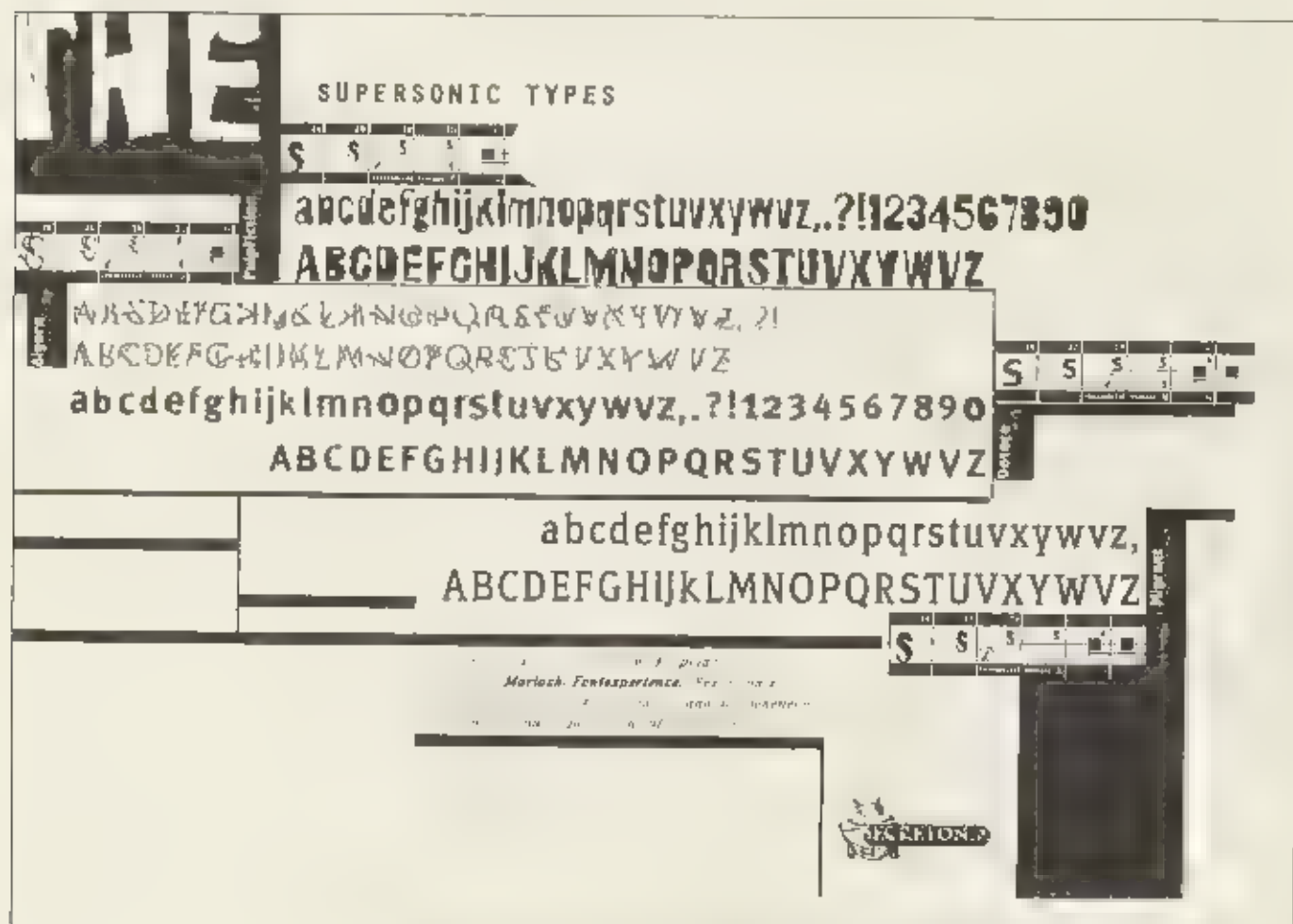
Mariachi Fontexperience (Portugal)

L'excés de legibilitat pot
arribar a provocar la paràlisi
cerebral

ozone/ozono
OZO type
WARNING!
this type is dangerous
for pregnant la dies :
It ca n corrupt the
coming baby.
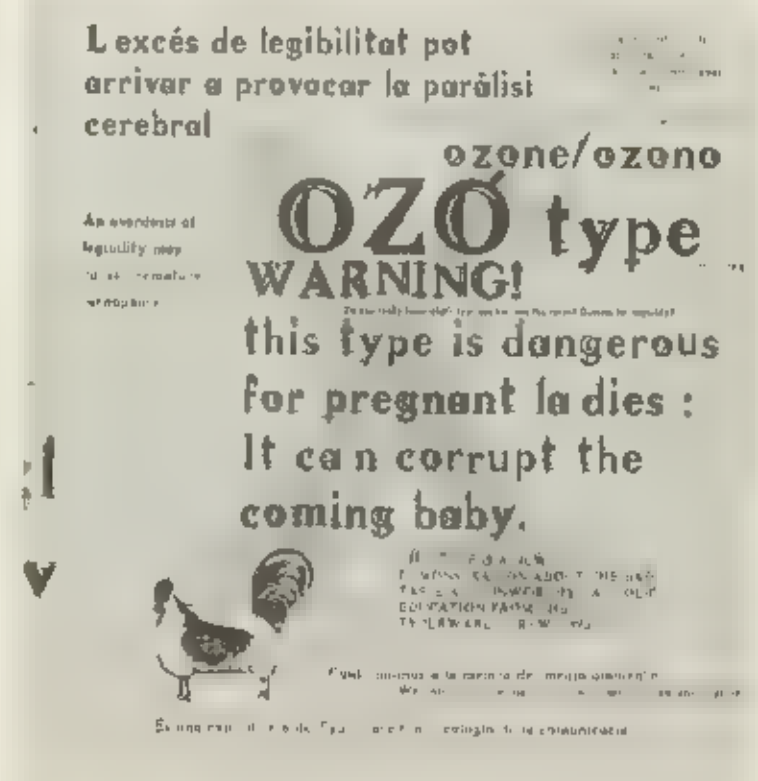
Garcia Fonts & Co. (Spain)

The *Agfa Type Idea Catalog* designed by Carlos Segura features many of the experimental [T-26] fonts such as Osprey designed by Stephen Farrell **(1994)**.

ABCDEF
GHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUV
WXYZ
(1234567890)

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MEGA
OLD STYLE
PORTABLE
TREAT TYPE

BIG ED'S USED SR.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
123456789 !@#$%&*?

BIG ED'S USED LAZYBOY

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
123456789 !@#$%&*?

The American Type Corp. (U.S.A.)

THE
CONVER
SION
OF
SAINT
PAUL

The Apollo Program (U.S.A.)

many typefaces as there are Pantone colors, greatly increasing and enhancing the variety of work being created.

Besides the fact that this small revolution has questioned the very foundations of graphic design and type design, of what is good and what is bad, of what is legible and illegible, personally I also find it amusing to see established companies like Agfa distributing the experimental fonts of small, independent foundries, and a company like Adobe releasing a series of typefaces called "Wild Type."

But Matthew Carter sums it up best in an interview in *Eye*. **"For most of my life type design has been seen as a brave but arcane business that requires a lifetime's dedication to produce a single typeface. I'm happy that notion has gone, that type design has been demystified. You can look at some of the stuff and suck your teeth and shake your head, but the fact is that I can't think of any other period in the history of typography when I would rather have been at work."**[6]

The design critic and historian Robin Kinross, who's a little less optimistic, is worried that these formal exercises will lead to a **"sad, restless search for whatever might look new"**[7] and wrote that **"formal innovation has meaning only when connected to a context of human need and use."**[8] Kinross, for instance, is partial to Tschichold's typeface "Neue Schrift" designed in 1929, because it addresses previously unexplored issues of phonetics.

6
Interview with
Erik Spiekermann
Eye Vol 3 no 11, 1993, p 16

7
Robin Kinross,
Modern typography,
London Hyphen Press
1992, p 140

8
Robin Kinross
RELICS OF THE MODERN, *Eye*,
Vol.3, No.11, 1993, p 66

fractured type, or simply equated with as yet another *new* stylistic convention, as many of the Cranbrook studies of the late 1980s demonstrate. It is a much larger construct that may influence *how* and *what* we design, and especially the ways in which we understand how design works in a larger context. But to reduce complexity of thought to mere stylistic features is to deny the complexity of interactions, to reduce the ability of designers so that they can only think about their work in terms of mere sound bytes and sugar.

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

New Haircuts, Old Scissors

The bike of my dreams is a BMW R75, one of those ancient motorcycles you see in World War II movies, the ones with the spokes. I originally saw them in Berlin, while I was sitting on the bombed out remains of a church turned tourist trap, watching fat Americans and groups of Japanese tourists stroll by. It was hard to discern if the tourists knew they were being heckled and leered at by skinheads. The unspeakable legacy of

Zombie Modernism
it exists outside their realm of comprehension.

In most areas of cultural production such as art, architecture, music, and literature, modernism was just one more event in a continuing life cycle. Graphic design, on the other hand, did not have sufficient time to develop a mature sense of self — the umbilical cord had not been severed yet. So when modernism died, many designers' ideology died with it. However, they did not go peacefully into that dark night. They refused to acknowledge their own ideological demise, and they continue to haunt the living, moaning and groaning because they no longer belong to this world. That is the fate of the Zombie Modernist, the living dead who design among us.

In the beginning, when modernism was young, it was a radical idea that positioned itself in opposition to a more conservative traditionalism. As time went on, the modernist ideology spread into all areas of cultural production, eventually becoming the dominant aesthetic ideology.

EMPEROR 8
EMPEROR 10
EMPEROR 15
EMPEROR 19

The Emperor, Universal, Oakland, and Emigre faces were originally designed as bitmap fonts for use on the 72-dot-per-inch computer screen and dot-matrix printer before high-resolution outline fonts were available. Since the coarse resolution does not allow for a faithful representation of the same design for a variety of sizes, these faces relate by a system of whole pixel increments. The Emperor family consists of a series of faces that maintain the same one-pixel stem to two-pixel counter ratio, while varying the vertical cap height. The Universal family uses a one-pixel stem to three-pixel counter ratio, and Oakland and Emigre families use a two-pixel stem to two-pixel counter ratio.
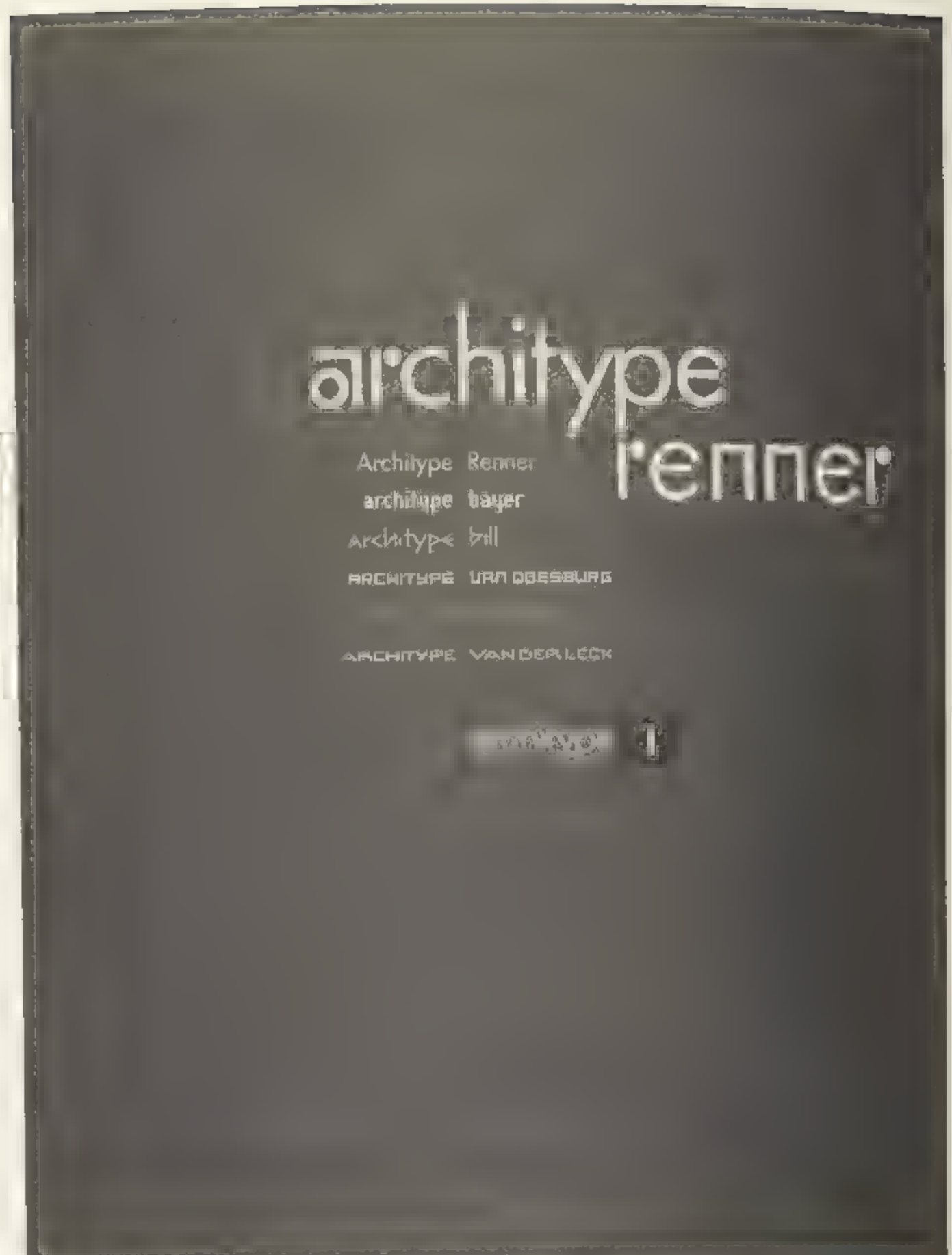
Advertisement for Architype foundry's "Volume One," a set of six typefaces in PostScript format "originating from the New Typography epitomized by the Bauhaus and De Stijl movements." The Volume includes Tschichold's phonetic typeface "Neue Schrift" (1994).

Zombie Modernism

Design was an extremely effective tool in converting the masses to modernity; it spread modernism from a few liberal thinkers to a conservative majority. Consequently, designers defined design as a modernist practice, and design's history and theory exist almost exclusively within the modernist paradigm.

Unfortunately, design's modernism is an ill-considered version of art modernism, one that is based on an Enlightenment faith in progress and singular answers, reinforced by a rationalist universalism. Modernist design theory has developed little beyond the reiteration of modernist platitudes that are endlessly repeated but that are not expanded, questioned, or adjusted to meet the needs of design theory and practice.

Only in the past few years has there emerged a sufficient amount of work and writing to challenge the hegemony of design modernism. This has prompted some modernist designers to re-evaluate and re-define modernism. They want to appear relevant, without giving up...

However, it wasn't until 1994 that Jan Tschichold's typeface "Neue Schrift" has finally been made available, together with a host of other experimental fonts from the 20s and 30s. So although a lot can be found wrong with today's commercial type market, at least there now exists a climate in which the most ideological designs can be realized. But there has to be a healthy commercial style-driven industry to make it all possible. You simply can't have one without the other.

At Emigre, Zuzana Licko started her career as a type designer working mostly on experimental fonts that directly addressed the limitations of low resolution computer screens and dot matrix printers. From the very start, these designs were undertaken to expand, improve or add something of use, but commercially, because of their limited applicability, these typefaces were failures. It required the release of fonts such as Modula and Matrix, which were derived from those first experiments but had greater appeal because they looked more familiar, to provide an income. Remedy,

Remedy

Typeface designed by Frank Heine (1991).

too, which was philosophically the exact opposite of Licko's early font designs, and offered no value other than a stylistic one, became a huge commercial success.

As these experiments in typography and type design, which were once considered some-

World War II seemed not to be a source of shame for the skinheads, especially those who wore red shoelaces. What they seemed to take pride in is what gets lost in made-for-television movies: the Holocaust was part of a very long historical tradition of pogroms and witch hunts, extending back for hundreds and hundreds of years. What the skinheads really know is design - how to mark themselves visually to threaten and subvert the established order, how design works within hegemonic structures and how to turn those structures on their head. **This is not the type of design you see in the "better" design journals,** not the design practiced by professionals: **this is design that knows how it works.**

Friedman's solution to the troubles that plague our contemporary situation   social injustices, economic troubles, intolerance, nuclear threat, environmental disasters, the toxic effects of television, misplaced priorities - is reasonable enough, at first glance. Designers should respond, in his view, with a "determined

Zombie Modernism

the privileged position that a universalist dogma constructs. These last ditch efforts superficially pay lip service to, and subsequently disavow, the importance, complexity, and diversity of contemporary culture.

Design modernism's hegemony reveals itself in its countless annual shows and publications that primarily function to establish a universal standard of "excellence" by a constant canonizing of "modernist masters" in design,[1] the absolutist, rationalist, obsession with, "problem-solving," "clarity," and "legibility," and the paranoid attacks against anything that is pluralistic, de-centered, or new.

[1]. Books on design can be divided into two types: "serious" monographs on famous modernist masters (the canon), and "fun" collections of vernacular ephemera (the "other").

The core philosophy of modernist design is in instrumentalist, or pragmatic thought. "Pragmatism is America's only native philosophy."[2] It is goal-oriented, practical, and distrustful of all things metaphysical. Paul Rand frequently quotes John Dewey: "In Deweyan pragmatism there is no ecstasy, no Dionysian muse, no charismatic illumination."[3] It is this pragmatism that is at the root of America's "down to earth" but decidedly "cranky" tone in criticism (this essay not excluded).

[23]

[2]. John Patrick Diggins, The Promise of Pragmatism Modernism and the Crisis of Knowledge and Authority Chicago The University of Chicago Press, 1995
[3]. Ibid

What's on your PowerBook?

Terry Ellis
President of
Imago Records

Notes for speeches
Notes to my assistant
Notes regarding a charity
dinner I'm organizing
My children's
sports schedules
Company marketing plans
Company budgets
A calculator
One of my
daughter's poems
America Online
Now Up-to-Date
Microsoft Word
A fax modem
A personal organizer
Racehorse
breeding records
A calendar of my
artists' concerts
PTA meeting notes
A dictionary
A thesaurus
Archive files
of correspondence
A recipe for
Yorkshire pudding

Henry Rollins
Musician/
Spoken Word
Performer

My show log
My workout log
Eye Scream, a book
in progress
Get in the Van, a book
in progress
Other people's books
I'm proofreading
A fax modem
My journal
An article for *Details*
An article for *Purr*
DateBook Pro
Virex
PSI Fax
The release schedule for
Infinite Zero Records
My tour schedule
The preface to a
friend's book
Liner notes for Hubert
Selby's spoken word CD
Transcripts from
recent interviews
Notes for my next video
A list of things
that are true

Henry Rollins
endorsing the Apple
Powerbook in
Publish magazine
(1994).

what innocent, seem to be taking hold, serious questions are now being raised about the new design of the past ten years. As the work has started appearing in the mainstream, it is often discounted for showing up in diluted form and in inappropriate places.

When i first saw Henry Rollins in *Publish* magazine advertising the Apple PowerBook, my first reaction was to think, Henry, you're selling out! Henry Rollins probably epitomizes American Punk music, or at least he used to. What's he doing advertising PowerBooks? But then i thought, why not? The PowerBook is not a bad product and the money he's earning probably goes right back into his independent book publishing company. So why not? Henry's paid his dues. For over 15 years, he's traveled around the world, sleeping in vans and dirtbag motels, getting beer thrown at him and spit on by his fans. i think he did the right thing. What else is Henry to do, wait for the NEA to provide him with funds to finance his publishing? i think not.

Selling Out

Although the eventual commodification of these ideological subcultural movements is usually seen as negative, they were, of course, from the very beginning, a commodity to someone. The Sex Pistols were initially an extension by which McLaren and his partner, the fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, were able to package and show off their clothing designs.

social conscience," to become cultural provocateurs who radically reconsider a more inclusive promise of modernism within a new context. What is maddening though, is that Friedman also has at least three troublesome points in his argument. One is a nostalgic return to some mythic time when "designers were cultural visionaries leading society."

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

Another seems to be an assumption that designers can heroically stand outside of, or at least against, a larger context of processes that include developers, marketing forces, and corporate interests that drive capitalism. Somehow, **magically**, if we just reexamine and reconnect to our modernist roots and reconfigure them for our context, we will be able to push back the ill effects of capitalism single-handedly. Finally, by limiting design to how it is practiced and produced solely within our profession, viewing the vernacular as a mere idiom (again, back to style), he limits and isolates what is possible for designers in their potential

Zombie Modernism

In Europe we find, not surprisingly, that design critic Robin Kinross's philosophical hero is the neo-pragmatist, Jürgen Habermas, the German hyperrationalist whose faith is that "language, however distorted and manipulative, always has consensus or understanding as its inner *telos*,"[4] and that "the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the interpretation of the good and the true life."[5]

4. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Basil Blackwell, 1990
5. Quoted in Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, (London 1978), p 273

Habermas's and Dewey's pragmatism is not an unlikely source of interest for designers, particularly die-hard modernist. I wonder how our pragmatist critics overlooked Richard Rorty, America's best known (neo-pragmatist) philosopher, who makes use of the ideas of Dewey and Derrida. Many designers are disturbed by the Marxist and leftist politics of postmodern theorists, but absolutely nothing has been said of the right-wing conservatism of the modernist theorist. Is that simply because design consists of a silent conservative majority? Following the historical model of early, classical, and late periods, I would categorize modernist ideology in graphic design as; starting with the (early) pragmatic, art historical dogma of...

[25]

So, too, *Ray Gun*. Although much is made of the current commodification of the "Ray Gun style," one could argue that *Ray Gun* was already the commodification of the formal experiments done in typography at Cranbrook, CalArts and other places. Although *Ray Gun* positions itself as an alternative magazine with a street attitude, from the very beginning it was financially backed and distributed first by Ingram and currently by Time Warner, two of the largest magazine distributors in the U.S. And its "attitude" can hardly be explained as having risen from the streets. Carson, a college graduate and sociology teacher with many years of design experience at mainstream lifestyle magazines, often collaborates on *Ray Gun* with graduate design students from Cranbrook, CalArts and Yale. Not exactly the staff of *Sniffin' Glue*. When it comes right down to it, no matter how alternative or anti-design it might look, *Ray Gun* is a corporate tool to help sell records, and lots of 'em. So when this "anti-design" or "Ray Gun style" eventually shows up in Pepsi Cola or Nike ads or the Time Warner Annual Report, which it inevitably does, I don't see how that is any more or less appropriate. Pepsi Cola and Nike, like *Ray Gun*, all sell products and all go to roughly the same kind of audience. Does that particular design approach belong any more to *Ray Gun* than it does to Pepsi or Nike? Or did it really only belong to the arts organizations Ed Fella worked for?

When Martin Fox, the publisher of *Print* magazine, wonders why America doesn't have much of an avant-garde, and goes on to ponder that perhaps **"it's because the avant-**

understanding and actions. That Friedman offers possible solutions to the problems that plague us is a necessary, courageous and morally admirable act. It is the structure of his solutions that are troublesome. He presents us with an either/or scenario: either accept idealistic roots of modernism or fall into the very polarities he seeks to abrogate.

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

Evidently, other possible solutions, such as the development of a critical practice that would seek to problematize and clarify design's relationship to larger forces the ways that divisions of labor, state power, and gendered, ethnic, national and sexual subjectivities, bodies and knowledges (aspects of ideology) are all crucial to our social production - bears a dystopian pessimism that he would evidently rather turn a blind eye toward. He places the responsibility for change in the hands of designers, but also states that "design should be repositioned so that it is viewed more as an enrichment to culture and not only as a service to business."

Zombie Modernism

Paul Rand, ossifying into the (classical) traditionalist, hyperrationalism of Robin Kinross, only to dissipate into the (late or rococo) decorative, modernism of Dan Friedman.[6]

Although the work of these modernists differs greatly, the message is the same; "I am the voice of clarity and reason," "I am the voice of authority and progress," and "I am in charge of this family's values." From the Bauhaus to our house, this "father-knows-best" baloney has always passed for design theory. Graphic design's alleged birth place, the Bauhaus, has, from the start, been idealized and mythologized by designers. "The pathos of such idealism has been revealed by subsequent events. The fact that the school was destroyed by Fascism may have enhanced its credibility in post-war Europe and the United States, but its ideal of universality was a myth and mirage, shattered by the war, politics and the demands of a consumer society."[7]

6 Dan Friedman is not a designer I have chosen to define my position as that of an artist whose subject — design and culture — affects all aspects of life " However his new book *Dan Friedman Radical Modernism*, has been reviewed and received as a design book (, found it in the design section of my local bookstore), and he continues to be a design educator, so I am treating him here as a designer. His impact in design was substantial his impact on the art world has yet to be seen

7. Gillian Naylor, *The Bauhaus Reassessed*, E. P. Dutton, 1985 p.180

Creation myths die hard, if at all. The Zombie Modernist refuses to let go of modernism at any cost.

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Martin Fox,
EDITORS' CHOICE,
Print, XLVIII·V,
Sept.-Oct, 1994, p 102.

garde is forever being coopted by the mainstream culture,"9 one could argue that the avant-garde is perhaps alive and well; it just happens to be selling merchandise worth millions of dollars. Instead of always looking at it from the point of view that mass consumption is a bad thing, and anything assisting it is guilty by association, perhaps a bit of credit is due to the mainstream for taking some risks, and to the avant-garde for infiltrating mainstream culture. What, otherwise, is the purpose of an avant-garde, and what is expected of mainstream culture if both are continually expected to play out their stereotypical roles of fringe innovators and greedy but clueless copycats? I'm not saying here that the avant-garde exists simply to supply the commercial world with the means to sell more products, but I do think it can be beneficial for both to occasionally share ideologies.

That's why I get a great kick out of seeing Barry Deck's typeface Template Gothic used in the *Times Warner Annual Report* or Sue LaPorte's typeface in a Nike ad, or Jeffery Keedy's typeface in a Fox television commercial. Who's using who. anyway? I'd like to believe that Def Jam's president Davis Harleston is right when he says: **"Why we feel lucky is because over the last five or six years, the entry of Rap into more mainstream America, or the crossing over of our kind of Hip-hop into the pop world, has really been more about the pop world coming to us, and less about us going to them."**10

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S H. Fernando Jr.,
The New Beats
New York Doubleday,
1994, p 171

Who should or is able to achieve this is not clear. Although he states the opposite, Friedman's argument and evidence suggests that he sees design as a profession rather than a cultural expression, available to and practiced by more than a narrow range of trained professionals.

How are we to understand the relationship of Friedman's own work to his arguments? While he points to and problematizes a few examples, it is unclear whether or how his work should be understood in relation to his words. Do high priced fetish commodities, for instance (I am including art here), like small run furniture, ameliorate, among other things, "overexposure to brutality" and "the separation between us and them?" And if so, how?

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

Friedman characterizes the forces that are again reconfiguring our world, at an increasingly accelerated pace.

Zombie Modernism

For the Zombie Modernist, everything outside of modernism is chaos, superficial, trendy, of poor quality, and just an empty formal style. It became increasingly difficult for designers to keep the myth alive. Gropius himself, in an effort to recuperate modernism in design, said in 1968: "The complexity and psychological implications, as we developed them at the Bauhaus, were forgotten and it [modernism] was described as a simple-minded, purely utilitarian approach to design."8 The fact is, for the most part, it was a simple-minded, purely utilitarian approach that continues to be taught the same way today. Likewise, the Granddaddy of all Zombie Modernists, Paul Rand, complains in his latest book that "The Bauhaus, into whose history is woven the very fabric of modernism, is seen as a *style* rather than as an idea."9

Echoing that sentiment, the radical Zombie Mod Dan Friedman says in his latest book, "Many in design think of modernism as a style that began in the Bauhaus in the 1920s and fell into disrepute in the 1960s. But modernism means different things and is traced to different origins...

8 Ibid

9. Paul Rand, *Design, Form, and Chaos*,
New Haven and London· Yale University Press, 1993, p 212

[27]

THE resemblance BeTWeeN YOU AND aNDre IS
UNCaNNY BeCaUse YOU BOTH are
WeaRING THE NeW AIR CHaLLeNGe FUTURE tennis SHOE FROM NIKE WITH THE
EXOSKELETAL STRAPPING aND THE HUARACHE-FIT™INNERBOOT system WHICH MOLDS
TO YOUR FEET aND YOU BOTH eNJOY THE BETTER LATERAL MOTION BeCaUse OF THE
LONG FLEXIBLE EXTENTS ALL HeRRINGBONE OUTSOLE AND YOU SHaRe AN
INCREDIBLE amOUNT OF CUSHIONING HaTS OFF TO THE NIKE-AIR® CUSHIONING IN THE
HEEL AND FOREFOOT AND THERE ARE
MYRIAD OTHEr THINGS YOU HaVE IN COMMON LIKE
THE FOOTFRAME™DeVICE AND THE MIRROR LENS ON STRAP WITH
RIGGED HOOK AND LOOP CLOSURE FOR INSTANCE AND

LeT'S FacE IT IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE HAIR
aND THE earring AND THE WIMBLeDON

CUP YOU GUYS COULD Be, LIKE
TWINS
TWINS

The typefaces used in these designs were originally
developed at CalArts. Faculty member Edward Fella
describes the work as "...a project of font design using
the vernacular and ideas of irregularity and
disintegration, as well as an ideology of anti-mastery."
The typefaces are Jeffery Keedy's Keedy Sans (Bottom)
used in a Fox Television promotion designed by Jon Hoppe
Lee (1994). Sue LaPorte's typeface Eve (Left) in a Nike
print ad designed by David Carson (1994), and Barry
Deck's Template Gothic (Top right) in the *1991 Times
Warner Annual Report* designed by Gips Balkind (1991).

Barry Deck's typefaces were created autonomously, the result of authentic human discovery and exercise, not as the extension of some kind of marketing research. Ask Barry Deck why he designed these fonts and he'll tell you that it was cheaper for him to draw his own typefaces than to go out and buy them. Actually, you could say that here human need and use was the motive, although the CalArts curriculum, which greatly encouraged type design, should receive some credit as well. To say that the work loses its original experimental or subversive qualities when coopted by mainstream campaigns is perhaps infusing it with a bit too much specific meaning in the first place. And to say that it is used everywhere simply because it's currently the cool font is discounting the fact that perhaps it has certain universal qualities that foster its widespread use, which is usually seen as a great asset for a typeface.

Who Needs Another Typeface?

When Emigre commits to releasing a font like Template Gothic, we tend to not ask whether there's a need for it because, obviously, in the world of type design, we have long ago moved from the idea of addressing human needs to that of satisfying desires. There's as little need for another revival of Bodoni as there is for a design like Template Gothic. However, we do feel a responsibility to produce a good product, one that functions perfectly, that isn't wasteful, that makes good use of resources and is reasonably priced. In

as making us "dizzy." Perhaps he is referring to the conditions and phenomena described by Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, and Guattari and Deleuze, among others. We would profit by more explication of this affect as much as we would by the emphasis on formal studies and their inclusion in all levels of education that Friedman insists upon.

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

Rather than assume designers are exclusively a group of professionals who can remain outside of or stand against larger forces, I would argue for a different view, perhaps spiral in structure: that we are products of and affected by our culture, which includes but is not limited to its embodied visual manifestations. In turn, what we do affects that very culture and its processes, not in a straightforward, linear progression and not in a way we can ever completely control. In turn, we are affected once again. the screw always turning. In this view, we are not isolated but imbricated within much larger processes, processes we need

Zombie Modernism

by different people. Philosophers, for example, trace it to the seventeenth century and the dual influences of rationalism and humanism."[10] I am not sure exactly what the point is, but I'm sure there is one. The important thing is that *modernism is not a style.*

10. Dan Friedman, *Dan Friedman: Radical Modernism,* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1994 p 114

That's right, modernism is *no longer* a style, it's an ideology, and that ideology is conservatism.
Modernism, unarguably design's greatest asset, has become its greatest liability because it is inextricably bound to conservative dogma. As such, design has become primarily an ideologically conservative practice.
In *Design, Form and Chaos,* Paul Rand quotes A. N. Whitehead: *"Mere change without conservation is a passage from nothing to nothing. Mere conservation without change cannot conserve."*
(The emphasis on the first sentence is Mr. Rand's.) This quote is instructive not only as an illustration of Mr. Rand's usual harping against change, but also for its assumed goal to "conserve." Modernist designers believe the function of design is to "conserve" universal values in designed objects. I suspect most designers are comfortable with that idea, even though few of them will admit...

[29]

regard to a typeface, this means that it should have foreign accents resulting in over 250 characters. It should be constructed such that the fewest Bezier curve segments are used, that there are no consecutive collinear straight line segments, and that its endpoints are always placed at most horizontal or vertical extremes. To discuss its form, however, is like discussing the color of a brick. It gets rather subjective. What concerns us is that when people use these bricks, they will work and won't crumble.

11 & 12
Robin Kinross,
FROM THE PUBLISHER,
Hyphen Press/books on design,
1994 1995

Although I've talked a great deal about how the Macintosh has accommodated the independent manufacture and distribution of typefaces, there are many products that can now be realized by entrepreneurial individuals. For instance, Robin Kinross, by producing his books on a Macintosh computer, was able to bypass traditional book publishers. According to Kinross, **"Free from the pressures entailed in large-scale publishing, critical views can be formulated and disseminated without modification."** [11] Both *Modern typography* and *Fellow readers* are well-designed books and a great read. But what makes them unique is that they were self-published by Kinross. They stand as another great example of how individuals become empowered when using the Macintosh computer and taking matters in their own hands. One can pose the question, "What human need and use is there for yet another book on typography?" but that's not important. What is important is that these books were published undiluted

to more fully and seriously understand.

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

Wild Bill works at the National Archives and is a walking encyclopedia - one of those annoying people with a photographic memory, but with a devastatingly droll sense of humor and insight. He'd meet me at the Zeitgeist to share the miserable nature of his work, which often sounded like a cross between being locked up in the ending sequence of Citizen Kane and Kafka's "The Trial." Yet, I often thought Wild Bill's would be the one voice that designers could find useful, as his ability to look at the breadth and scope of the context and history of an artifact extended well beyond the superficial. Although Wild Bill met the biker stereotype in form and facial hair, his meek demeanor was tolerated only because the habitués of the Zeitgeist valued his knowledge. He could give any biker a good twenty minutes on the history of their particular model of motorcycle, its manufacturer, historical precedents and antecedents, its relationship to political and economic contexts,

Zombie Modernism

it publicly. Most designers claim to be very liberal, or even radical, like their early modern art heroes. But this is 1995, not 1925, and we are formulating design practice, not art history.
Recently I interviewed design critic Rick Poynor, and I asked him if he was a modernist or a postmodernist. He said, "The problem I have with postmodernism is the relativism and nihilism that follows it."[11] Understandably, many design critics are reluctant to give up the absolute values of modernism because that is what makes design criticism an easier, right or wrong proposition.

11. Rick Poynor, AN INTERVIEW WITH RICK POYNOR. BY MR. KEEDY, *Emigre*, no 33, Winter 1995, p.35

By contrast, the contextual postmodern approach is "relative," because the discourse is relative to the subject at hand. This greater demand for specificity and complexity is often dismissed as "nihilism" or "chaos." Mr. Poynor went on to say, "So I recognize what you say; that there is, at times, in the way I write and in the areas that interest me, a split between those two areas of thinking (modernism and postmodernism) — an acknowledgment of one, and maybe a hankering after the other."[12] It is precisely this fearful and nostalgic...

12. Ibid

and untouched by the influence of a major book publisher. Whether there's a need for them will be decided in the marketplace. I hope someday to do an interview with Kinross for *Emigre.* I can't wait to find out whether he's finding an audience for these **"substantial, lasting and well-achieved things,"** [12] and whether he's making a profit. If not, I suggest that he invest a bit more time and money in his public relations efforts.

d'end

relationships to the development of manufacturing techniques, and trivia relating the bike to Hollywood movies, novels, pornography, geography, and the fashion of disparate classes.

I wonder what would happen if Dan Friedman and Wild Bill spent time together at the Zeitgeist. It's not the type of place one would associate with the trendy, squeaky clean, upwardly mobile place that designers tend to haunt, but there, they would find a certain leveling ground, a community of people who do not share common class interests as much as a relationship to a commodity fetish. What they understand, at some level, is that a motorcycle is an object that at once embodies and refracts the flow of forces driven by history, materiality, and social, political, and economic phenomena. Harleys and Japanese crotch rockets, construction workers and frustrated lawyers, bull dykes and macho men gather under the bunny-eared, bow tied skull.

HANGIN' AT THE ZEITGEIST

San Francisco is a different place now. *Emigre* moved to Sacramento. The noodle bar is gone, there are cyberbikergeeks at the Zeitgeist now; but I do not long for its earlier past,
only for the comfort it always offers.

END

[31]

Dan Friedman's
radical MODERNISM:
The Dynamics of Inscription
Andrew Blauvelt

Reviewing a book, especially a designer's monograph, is a difficult task. The usual challenge of such a review encounters more problems when the subject of discussion involves modernism and postmodernism. It has become clear that discussions about modernism in graphic design are growing increasingly more sophisticated, while discussions about postmodernism are as problematic as ever. While historical perspective plays a large role in this situation, it is compounded by the dynamics of this particular occasion, where Friedman is attempting to place himself (through his book) against the way others may have placed him at certain times during his career (in magazine articles, exhibitions and reviews), while I attempt to position him yet again (through this critical review). What I hope to achieve is a discussion of how modernism and postmodernism are represented in graphic design that is larger than Dan Friedman's work, while attempting to map the dynamics at play that serve to position his work. It is this process of positioning that I liken to the act of inscription. To inscribe is to write and to dedicate (in a book), as well as to draw one figure inside of another. It is this latter sense of inscribe — how one thing fits into an-

Zombie Modernism

"hankering" for modernism that has retarded the intellectual growth of design theory and criticism, and has hidden a deep seated conservatism.

My aim in this essay is to examine modernism in design, not make a case for postmodernism.
If you would have told me ten years ago that I would still be making a case for postmodernism
in design in 1995, I probably wouldn't have believed it because the political imperative that
drives modernism-at-all-cost in design was not as evident to me then, and I assumed design would move along with other cultural practices.

How, then, should postmodernism in general be evaluated? My preliminary assessment
would be this: That in its concern for difference, for the difficulties of communication, for
the complexity and nuances of interests, cultures, places, and the like, it exercises a
positive influence. The metalanguages, metatheories, and metanarratives of modernism
(particularly in its later manifestations) did tend to gloss over important differences, and
failed to pay attention to important disjunctions and details. Postmodernism has been
particularly important in acknowledging "the multiple forms of otherness as they emerge
from differences in subjectivity, gender and sexuality, race and class, temporal (configurations
of sensibility) and spatial geographic locations and dislocations."[13]

13. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, 1990, p 113

Zombie Modernists survive
by eating the living flesh of postmodernism

The Zombie Modernist's biggest enemies are postmodernism and deconstruction because
they reveal that the simplistic, rationalist/universalist modernism of design is long dead and starting to stink.

"We know the world only through the medium of language. Meaning is arbitrary. Meaning
is unstable and has to be made by the reader. Each reader will read differently. To
impose a single text on the readers is authoritarian and oppressive. Designers should make
text visually ambiguous and difficult to fathom, as a way to respect the rights of the readers."[14]

14. Robin Kinross, *fellow readers: notes on multiplied language* London: Hyphen Press, 1994 p 5

other, their points of contact — that I wish to evoke in this article. As Dan Friedman writes himself, he inscribes notions of modernism and postmodernism within his concept of radical modernism; while I write about Dan Friedman, I trace his inscription of radical modernism.

THE SPECTER OF MODERNISM

The publication of *Dan Friedman: Radical Modernism* offers me an opportunity, as it offers Friedman, of discussing the seemingly well-worn territory of modernism. For all the discussion about modernism within the design press of late, including the volatile exchange of generational "trash talk," there is surprisingly little attention devoted to its passing. These arguments have collapsed into two camps: Massimo Vignelli's affirming call "Long live Modernism!" and Jeffery Keedy's epithet of "designosaurs." The body of modernism is being exhumed, its spirit resurrected and autopsies performed to ascertain its cause(s) of death. Why this spate of activity? I believe that modernism is now, for all intensive purposes, a historical phenomenon for both sides of the debate. Since it has been relegated to the past, it can become available for a number of purposes, such as historical interpretation, stylistic appropriation and for those who don't seem sure of its demise, either an effigy that can be (symbolically) killed again or resuscitated by the breath of renewed hopes and dreams. All of

_Zombie Modernism

This is the "straw man" of postmodernism that Robin Kinross props up so he can knock it down with his universalist, rationalist, truth-seeking, neo-con rant titled *Fellow readers*.

That we understand the world through language, that meaning is unstable, and that people tend to interpret things differently are hardly radical or wacky ideas. What *is* wacky is Kinross's hilarious interpretation of how postmodernist designers react to this condition. It does strike me as a bit "authoritarian" and "oppressive" to "impose" a single *anything* on any one. I like choices. People who believe in democracy are nutty that way. However, *assuming* a single reading from a text is just plain stupid (even Mr. Habermas has failed to make a convincing argument). Given that multiple readings are inherent in most texts (too relativist an idea for Kinross because "truth" loses its absolutism), it doesn't make any sense to make the text even more "difficult to fathom" unless you absolutely hate the reader.

But Mr. Kinross already knows that the whole point of his ridiculous characterization of poststructuralist theory is to insist that without modernism all is chaos, obscurantism, lies, and nonsense meant to draw attention to megalomaniac designers **(like me, me, me)**.

Robin Kinross is an Enlightenment Era throwback who has taken it on himself to be the quality control officer of our "common society." He goes about this task with a decidedly "un-common" set of ideological and formal values that never seem to make their way beyond the posh and precious world of limited edition, fine, collectable books. As one of society's "common folk," let me be the first to say, "Gee, thanks, Robin!"

I have included Mr. Kinross as the European representative of fundamentalist, modernist thinking. There are others, but he presents the most compelling argument, such as it is. As with most cultural concerns, the "European version" is "classier" than the "American version," but the political strategy is the same. The usual party line of the far right is: We are being led astray by "bad people" (academics, pinkos, perverts), and they are steering us away from the "truth" (family values, Jesus,...

[33]

these distinct activities reveal the lapsed nature of modernism in unique ways. Historical interpretation reveals the complexity of modernism in its discovery of a plurality of modernisms. Since modernism is now consigned to the past and therefore seen in hindsight, we can "discover" a variety of expressions, thereby undercutting the monolithic view of modernism as solely reductive, abstract, exclusive and impersonal.

"While some Moderns clung to dogma, the influence of new styles forced many others to veer towards more eclectic forms. Indeed the tension between Modernism and eclecticism gave rise to what might be called 'Late Modern'..."

Steven Heller, DESIGN (OR IS IT WAR) IS HELL, *Emigre*, no. 33, p 43

Stylistically, the visual forms of modernism become available again, having been out of favor just long enough, distanced from the ideology of modernism. These forms are appropriated as pastiche.

"Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language... Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor..."

Fredric Jameson, POSTMODERNISM AND CONSUMER SOCIETY, *The Anti Aesthetic*, p.114

Emptied of their previous associations, these forms come to signify not modernism but the distance from modernism, previously out of stylistic bounds and just out of professional memory for a younger generation clearly not associated with modernism's past. Finally, modernism is characterized as

Zombie Modernism

order, clarity) for their own "selfish gain" (wealth, fame, power). We must get back on the "right track" (throw the bums out, vote for me, buy my vision).

Modernism in design went from a radical idea to a liberal ideal only to stagnate as conservative dogma. Because the Zombie Modernist doesn't want to come to terms with the fact that their ideology is dead, they are always trying to *rationalize* away (they think they own exclusive rights to everything that is rational) the postmodern condition the rest of us know as reality. That is why postmodernism must be discredited and exposed as empty formalism (a style), and one should never "attempt to go beyond Modernism." Typically, it goes something like this: "It (postmodern design) concentrates on visual techniques and individual solutions rather than on cultural context. Much of this 'Postmodern' design uses a visual vocabulary pioneered by the 1920's avant-garde, yet without the critique of cultural institutions that informed the found-object collages of Kurt Schwitters, the typographic havoc of the Futurists, or the socially engaged design of the Constructivists. Our attempts to go beyond Modernism are often realized by referring to visual techniques that we have been taught represent radicality: avant-garde design of the 1910s and 1920s."[15]

15. Mike Mills THE (LAYERED) VISION THING. *Eye*, no 8 vol 2, 992 The title is a reference to George Bush Ironic, huh?

Like the smooth "double talk" of Ronald Reagan, this makes sense if you don't think about it in any detail or any *actual* context. But the idea only makes sense in a contextless void, where there is no distinction between art and design or past and present   in the "metacontext" of design modernism. Even if we accept the dubious claim that art movements like dada and constructivism were effective as critical social discourse (as if Lissitzky's prouns and Schwitters' collages really enlightened the mostly illiterate masses who somehow had the luxury of visiting art galleries and museums from 1910 through the 1920s), whoever said it was design's ambition to "critique its cultural institutions, or it's clients"? The strategy of subversion is an art world pretension that has little relevance to design practice. To criticize design for its lack of "cultural critique" makes about as much sense as criticizing art for its inability to "solve problems." Art exists outside (above) society and is expected to be critical of it. Design exists inside (below) society and is expected to serve it. Many young designers today refuse to accept...

loss or absence. What is lacking, depending on the characterization, is either the continuation of the modern project itself,

"...the cultural thrust of the Modernist belief is still valid, because we still have too much trash around us, not only material trash, but intellectual trash as well. In that respect, I value, endorse, and promote the continued relevance of the Modern movement as the cultural mainstream of our century."

Massimo Vignelli, LONG LIVE MODERNISM!, *Looking Closer*, p.51.

or if viewed as absence, those practices excluded by modernism.

"That is something Modernism didn't account for; it didn't want to recognize regional and personal differences. People who have given their whole lives to supporting the classicising aesthetic of Modernism feel invalidated when we talk about this necessary inclusiveness, but diversity and inclusiveness are our only hope."

Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, *Eye*, No.8, Vol.2, p.6 .

The incompleteness of the modern project is expressed in its inability to attain the kind of integration of art into life that once seemed so promising; for example, the efforts of Soviet Constructivist designers to transform their society before Stalinist social realism ended that effort. This loss of faith in the ideals of modernism is distinct from a modernism that is cast as an exclusive practice; one that excludes, for example, the experiences and work of women and people of color or the visual languages found outside of its aesthetic vocabulary.

Zombie Modernism

that simple distinction, or any distinction between art and design, because they think art is somehow "better" than design (I think it has something to do with the fact that design is taught in ART schools).
Actually, most postmodern design was and is engaged in a critique of a cultural institution.
Obviously, postmodern design is very critical of *modern design* — design's cultural institution.
The effectiveness of its criticism is evident in how afraid the modernist designers today are of postmodernism.

The other half-baked idea, expressed in the quote above, is how those postmodern designers stole their forms from early modernist artist and are therefore less original (Never mind that the modernist designers also stole their forms from modern art). The modern art paradigm of originality or — Who Did it First? — *assumes* to be the most important factor in evaluating design (even though the art world itself has discredited that as a primary criteria years ago). Obviously the art world did it first because, at the time, graphic design as a discipline didn't even exist. So if we judge design by modern art standards, (as most of our so called *design* critics do) then design can't possibly "go beyond" (art) modernism. It can only catch-up, at best. Using art world paradigms for graphic design criticism not only renders postmodern design useless, but the validity of design practice itself is always in question.

If the Zombie Modernists can't discredit postmodernism, then they try to co-opt it. Whatever threatens to be new, or different, must immediately be subjugated to modernism. In an essay about Neville Brody's new project, *Fuse*, Michael Rock writes: "While the forms assume the variegated surface of post-modernism, the underlying issues indicate that projects such as *Fuse* are deeply rooted in Modernist goals of avant-guarde experimentation and artistic originality."[16] Sounds familiar? Michael Rock points out that *Fuse* is just continuing in the modernist tradition, (art tradition, that is. Never mind that *Fuse* exists in the design context). He then goes on and uses (Art critic) Rosalind Krauss's postmodern critique (of modern art) to lambaste the whole project. Is he advocating postmodernism? Art criticism? Of course not. The main point he feels compelled to make is that *Fuse*, like everything else in design, is still just "good ol' modernism."

16. Michael Rock, BEYOND TYPOGRAPHY, *Eye*, no 15, vol 4 Winter 994 p 31

THE POSTMODERN CONUNDRUM

can what began as a critique of modernism contribute to practices that operate more fully in the realm of their own construction, even on their own terms?

These diverse uses of historical modernism in design discourse and the inability to coherently articulate the attributes of postmodernism within design have contributed to the muddled discussions about what distinguishes the modern from the postmodern or, more importantly, to rescue a critical possibility for post/modernism. A significant factor contributing to the debate over postmodernism is the entanglement of modernism. The term "postmodernism" discloses this problem. At once suggestive of a break with or overcoming the concept of modernism, it can never, at least linguistically, depart from its subject of criticism. So central to its existence is it and no matter how hard it tries, postmodernism can never fully escape the concept of modernism. We should not be surprised, then, that discussions of postmodernism inevitably become discussions about modernism. Attempting to explicate a more complex understanding of postmodernism is wrought with difficulties; arguments spiraling inward, collapsing in the paradox of trying to establish autonomy on the basis of negation. Can what began as a critique of modernism contribute to practices that operate more fully in the realm of their own construction, even on their own terms? Or is modernism destined to remain the specter of postmodernism?

Zombie Modernism

Mr. Rock continues: "The stranglehold of a single, homogeneous Modernist theory is a designer's fantasy." As proof of the fact, he offers that "Even a cursory glance through a type house manual or popular magazine from the last 30 years should dash the idea that the world ever tottered on the brink of global Helvetican domination."[17] But is that proof of an alternative *theory* to modernism?

17. Ibid p 27

I know I will be accused of portraying modernism in design too narrowly and simplistically, particularly now that we have entered the revisionist-modernist era, when issues raised by postmodernism are routinely claimed as modernist by dredging up obscure precedents in modern art practice. It is no fantasy that there have been very few voices reaching the entire design community. The ones that have, however, are modernist ones ("Oh, but the times, they are a-changin'!").

If the hegemony of modernist design theory is a fantasy, where are all the essays and books on postmodern design theory? Where should we look for them? Certainly not in *I.D.* Magazine, where Ralph Caplan has been dispensing his "good-old-boy," "common-sense," modernist pap for years, only to be replaced by Mr. Rock's own, "pedantically-correct," "middle-of-the-road," modernism. Sounding a lot like *previous* Yale professor Paul Rand, Michael Rock writes in the *AIGA Journal*: "Perhaps the most socially *irresponsible* work is the overdesigned, overproduced, typographic stunts that serve no real function, speak only to other designers and the cultural elite, and through opulence and uselessness revel in a level of consumption that glorifies financial excess."[18]

18 Michael Rock, RESPONSIBILITY, BUZZWORD OF THE NINETIES, *AIGA Journal* vol 10, no 1, 1992

I doubt if Mr. Rock would complain about architects, doctors, engineers and scientist speaking only to themselves. Of course they talk to themselves; they are experts, specialists, and professionals. Because design is not a profession,[19] designers do not understand that professionals have a responsibility to each other to keep practicing at the highest level. That is how they protect the credibility and the value of their profession.

19 A professional is someone who has a specialized knowledge, skill and training that is regulated by their peers. Professionals establish standards of employment and advancement practice, research, development and education, to further that practice. Although most practicing designers today receive degrees from accredited universities there is also likely no necessity to have a degree to practice, and there are no regulated standards for practice or teaching. Design educators are, however the only professionals in design, because they are professional educators

Designers, however, have the trade mentality that the more accessible their work is,...

POSTMODERNISM AS HISTORICISM

The discussions surrounding postmodernism, within the design press but not limited to it, have always been plagued by the inability to disassociate it from historicism. The problem for graphic design was underscored by the recovery of historical forms during the formative and emergent period of post-modernism, beginning in the 1960s with nineteenth-century allusions, continuing in the 1970s with the appropriation of early twentieth-century avant-garde forms, and emerging fully in the 1980s with its penchant for nostalgic revivals. Consequently, postmodernism became synonymous with historicism on the basis of an anti-modern impulse, namely the impossibility of new form and the recourse to, not a break from, tradition. Compounding the association of postmodernism with historicism is the parallel drawn with graphic design to certain architectural practices that recover the historical forms and motifs of classicism. The chief proponent of such historicist tendencies in architecture is Charles Jencks, who was one of the first to use the term "postmodernism" to distinguish such practices from modern architecture's International Style. And while Jencks can pinpoint the end of modernity for architecture at 3:32 p.m., July 15, 1972, with the implosion of the Pruitt-Igoe Housing project in St. Louis, such symbolic exactitude escapes the field of graphic design. Instead, postmodernism for the rest of culture, including graphic design, suffers from the

Zombie Modernism

and the greater number they can service (over one billion served daily!), the more secure their jobs will be. This trade mentality is ironic coming from someone like Michael Rock who is not a professional as a designer, but is as an educator, a degreed, accredited, professional.

One can only guess who this "champion of the people" and *current* Yale professor considers the "cultural elite,"[20] but the fact that design critics pick up the rhetoric of the far right should come as no surprise. Whether it is politics, economics, aesthetics, or design, conservatism is still conservatism.

Most of the current debate in graphic design is characterized as a generational split between the older modernist and the younger postmodernist. As I have pointed out in this essay, there are more than a few vocal young modernists, as well as a few older postmodernists (Ed Fella, for example). It would be more accurate to characterize our current situation as the backlash of an entrenched conservatism against a real, or perhaps only imagined threat, of a relativist/liberal agenda. Design is certainly big enough to hold designers with conservative and liberal agendas, but I guess it's just a bad time for liberals everywhere now.

20. "Newt Gingrich, the new Speaker of the House promises to furnish many ingenious demonstrations of ways to dress authority in the rhetoric of anti elitism So far his handling of his status as a former professor has proved the most instructive When he first made his ill-fated appointment of a new House historian, Gingrich explained in a public appearance that he was in fact, a pro As 'a Ph D in history,' he said, 'I think I have the right to select an academic who has legitimate credentials . . . I think I may be peculiarly, of all the people who have been Speaker, in a legitimate position to make a selection that I think will be helpful in re-establishing the legitimacy of history
But when at the same appearance he was asked about his qualifications for teaching his course on American history at Reinhardt Collage, he was quick to put his anti-professionalism on display. 'I teach a course which is an outline of my thoughts at 51 years of age, based on everything I've experienced, which is frankly, rather more than most tenured faculty ' he noted 'I haven't written 22 books that are meaningless ' He's not a professional academic after all. He's a citizen professor We re going to see more of them "
Louis Menand, THE TRASHING OF PROFESSIONALISM, *The New York Times Magazine*, March 5, 1995 p 43

Ask yourself this question: If Newt Gingrich and Rush Limbaugh were graphic designers, would they be:
(A) Complaining about the "visual pollution," "typographic stunts," and the many short-comings of deconstruction and postmodernist design in centrist publications like *ID*, *Print*, *CA*, and the *AIGA Journal*?
Or would they be:
(B) Writing about new ideas and work in smaller circulation publications like *Emigre*, and academic publications like *Visible Language*, *Design Issues*, or ACD's *Statements*?

Hmmm?

As it became embarrassingly obvious that there were fundamental flaws in modernism as it traditionally functioned in design, some designers started to redefine modernism as a one-ideology-fits-all metaphilosophy.

[37]

historical amnesia engendered by the temporal discontinuities — the blurring of past, present and future — characteristic of historical reference and displacement; when today is the tomorrow of so many yesterdays.

POSTMODERNISM AS SOCIAL CATASTROPHE

The concept of postmodernism has been described as indicative of two modes: a neo-conservative historicism and a progressive poststructuralism.

"In art and architecture neoconservative postmodernism is marked by an eclectic historicism, in which old and new modes and styles (used goods, as it were) are retooled and recycled."

"Poststructuralist postmodernism, on the other hand, rests on a critique of representation: it questions the truth content of visual representation, whether realist, symbolic, or abstract, and explores the regimes of meaning and order that these different codes support."

Hal Foster, (Post)Modern Polemics, *Recodings*, pp.121 & 129

It is not surprising that the design press could only locate the concept of postmodernism within the revived and alluded to styles of the past and not within the theoretical debates surrounding both the construction of meaning and the critique of modernity provided by poststructuralism. It is only recently, in the 1990s, that the ideas associated with poststructuralism have found their way into the design press and, not surprisingly, are pitted against the ideology of modernism.

Zombie Modernism

"I view modernism in design as a broad, potentially open-minded, and inexhaustible way of thinking that began in the mid-nineteenth century and continues today among the majority of us who believe that we should use all existing means to understand, improve, change, and refresh our condition in the world."[21] Sounding suspiciously similar to the ingratiating speeches made by beauty pageant contestants, as in ". . . and I wish for world peace," modernist designers try to prove that their ideology is still *universally* relevant through a new (trendy?) commitment to good citizenship.

21. Dan Friedman, *Dan Friedman Radical Modernism*, Yale University Press, 1994. p 114
I consider the consistently favorable reviews of *Radical Modernism* as emblematic of the myopic New York based design press and the general "dumbing down" of America

"Modernism ran out of steam over a decade ago. But at its core is an ethic – the responsibility that a designer has to actively contribute to, indeed enhance, the social, political, and cultural framework — that continues to inform even the most diehard Postmodernist."[22] Wow, I had no idea that the whole concept of being a productive, responsible, citizen was invented by modernism! I thought it was just something modernists used to justify their aesthetic self-indulgence (I guess that's just the nihilistic, postmodern cynic in me).

22. Steven Heller, Design (or is it war?) is Hell, *Emigre* no. 33, Winter 1995. p 48

"Although the rhetoric proclaimed better goods or living conditions, the intended consumers, the public, had little chance to influence or shape Bauhaus ideology. The public became a misunderstood and mostly unwilling participant, blamed for its lack of worldly perspective and aesthetic-value discrimination."[23] Maybe the Bauhaus doesn't represent the "ethical core" of modernism. But then, what does? That's the great thing about modernism; you can pretty much take your pick from the past six decades.

23. Dietmar R Winkler, Morality and Myth, the Bauhaus Reassessed, *AIGA Journal*, vol 7, no. 4, 1990

In an effort to avoid change, contemporary modernist designers indulge themselves in a pathetic, kinder, gentler, morphing ideology that is virtually meaningless. The only connection that the current modernism has to what was once understood as modernism is that it is now *rationally* and *universally* useless. This "new" or "late" modernism is an exhausted modernism that designers prefer to a vibrant but *uncertain* postmodern future.

The myth of universal modernist values is so pervasive in design, that it swallows up even the...

"Over the last twenty years the quite rarefied ideas of a few thinkers in Paris have become common currency in intellectual discussion. And now, late in the day, after they have been seriously questioned at their source, these ideas have turned up in the rude world of design....This mish mash of the obvious and the absurd goes under different names: poststructuralism, deconstruction, deconstructivism, and — more generally and much more vaguely — postmodernism."

Robin Kinross, *Fellow Readers*, p.5.

These poststructuralist ideas should be familiar by now: the designer as author, ambiguity and indeterminacy in the message, interpretation by audiences, debates about communication, readability and legibility, among others. Not surprisingly, the concepts associated with poststructuralism have received little critical attention on their own terms and instead have been cast against the received knowledge of a profession that was formed and had its beginnings in the modern period. The idea of graphic design as a distinct specialization in service to the informational needs and consumptive demands of the market is impossible to think of without modernization. Challenges to the tenets of modernism are perceived as challenges to professional practice. Accordingly, the questioning of an unproblematic and conventional communications model (client with message problem, designer with message solution, audience as passive receiver) is perceived as an assault on communication itself and thus carries the seeds of social anarchy. There is a shift in focus away from post-

Zombie Modernism

possibility of an alternate ideology. "The fact is, it's foolish to deny that anyone who seriously explores the outer limits and inner soul of visual communication is not in some way a Modernist. Or as Pogo's Walt Kelley said: 'We have met the enemy and it is us.'"[24] I believe it would be more accurate to say "We have *reinvented* the enemy and it is us." By co-opting all change and difference into a simplistic modernist paradigm, we prohibit design from ever growing up and leaving its conservative modernist home. Imprisoned in a dilapidated old house built by modern art, design is unable to strike out on its own and make a place for itself in the world. Thus design's "outer limits and inner soul" is immobile, caught between heaven and earth, in a no-place, we call purgatory — the zombies' fate.

24. Steven Heller, DESIGN (OR IS IT WAR?) IS HELL, *Emigre* no. 33, Winter 1995, p 48

"Today no designer or design organization could or would contemplate universal solutions to the problems of design for the real world. We are still in search of a theory, social commitment is still elusive, so we indulge in our fantasies, ironies and pastiche, which are more comforting (and more profitable) than that respect for 'stern realities' that Gropius demanded from architecture and design."[25]

25. Gillian Naylor, *The Bauhaus Reassessed*, E. P. Dutton, 1985, p.180

Designers should stop "hankering" after a mythical modernist ideal, or pretending that art theory is a viable theoretical model for design. We don't need to "conserve" our past and resist change. We need to construct our future theoretical discourse, carefully, around the particular and exciting context of design. We must allow ourselves to look at design in new and challenging ways, we must look for — ourselves.

The End?

modernism as anti-modern historicism and towards postmodernism as anti-modern social catastrophe. (Paul Rand's *Design, Form and Chaos* pretty much sums it up.)

These reductions of postmodernism for graphic design leave two unseemly choices: design life trapped in its past/future, devoid of original expression and abandoning the hope of generating designs unique to the expression of our time; or design life trapped in its present/future, advocating the end of civilized communication and public discourse, wallowing in a quagmire of ego-centricity, producing designs that merely reflect the malaise of post-industrial society. In the wake of such reductions, it is not surprising that Dan Friedman and other designers attempt to locate themselves for themselves.

DAN FRIEDMAN AND POSTMODERNISM

Dan Friedman occupies a unique position within the debates surrounding post/modernism. Educated at Carnegie-Mellon under the influence of an Americanized version of Swiss style graphic design, Friedman traveled first to Ulm, Germany and later to Basel, Switzerland to study the practice first-hand. Friedman's exposure to the traditions and revisions of Swiss style modernism at Basel, particularly through the work of Wolfgang Weingart, place him squarely within the post/modern continuum. This continued with his graphic work in New York in the 1970s, including his association with April Greiman (then his wife), prior to her departure for Los Angeles. Friedman's work from the early 1970s has become emblematic of what was termed "new wave" graphic design and was later absorbed into a larger canon of work labeled postmodern, chiefly because it represented a revision of the strict, reductive, rational forms associated with modernism. The appearance of "new wave," "Swiss Punk," or "new Swiss" graphic design represented by the Wolfgang Weingart-Dan Friedman-Willi Kunz-April Greiman axis served to solidify the prevailing idea of modernism as "not them," despite much evidence to the contrary. In other words, the work of Dan Friedman and others necessitated a neologism ("the new") that effectively cast the operative notion of modernism ("the old") into the narrow and rather monolithic definition that it retains today, namely a form of Swiss style modernism of the Muller-Brockmann-Emil Ruder-Armin Hofmann type adapted for systematic usage within businesses, particularly multinational corporations. Thus the predictability, manageability and uniformity of graphic com-

Citibank logo and symbol (1975).

munications by corporations could be contrasted with the relatively un-
predictable ("random"), spontaneous ("intuitive"), gestural ("expressive") de-
vices found in the style of "newer" work. The initial gesture of grouping such
"new" work together occurred with the exhibition *Postmodern Typography: Re-
cent American Developments* (1977), which included the work of Friedman and
other Basel-educated designers. Postmodernism became defined as Basel ty-
pographic experimentation when it was first presented in the design press and
in history texts of the early 1980s.

"The design trends that have been labeled Post-Modernism are primarily the work of individuals
trained in the Swiss style who have enlarged the formal vocabulary."

Philip Meggs, POST-MODERNISM, *A History of Graphic Design*, p.483

The dominance of this definition defines new work within the decade
insofar as it resembles these prototypes and helps to conceal the emergence of
this work as a historical moment more than a decade before. Not surprisingly,
many designers associated with "new wave" graphic design chose to ignore this
moniker, as well as other generic titles, such as "postmodern," in favor of an
individual autonomy disassociated from any perceived stylistic movement and
its inevitable categorization. The distancing of the designer from the category
serves a two-fold purpose. First, he or she is able to maintain a sense of in-
dependence from stylistic trends and resists comparisons with others, which

Poster, Yale Symphony Orchestra (1975).

preserves a sense of originality and stylistic autonomy. Secondly, he or she is able to disavow any repudiation of modernism suggested by the prefix "post," particularly since many if not all were educated with its tenets and, most importantly, its ideals, and see their activity as simply a continuation, an evolution that fits perfectly within the modern notion of progress and within the "tradition" of an avant-garde.

The emergent period of postmodernism is often discussed in other disciplines within the context of the social transformations of the 1960s, both in the U.S. (war protests, ecology, civil rights) and in Europe, particularly the student and worker uprisings of 1968 in France. If examined in this way, we could locate various reactions to graphic modernism as local expressions during the 1960s, not only the reworking of Swiss typography by Weingart et al in Basel, but also the renewed illustrative and historicist styles of Push Pin Graphics in New York, the psychedelic posters of Victor Moscoso and Wes Wilson in San Francisco or even the East-meets-West/past-meets-present, Pop poster work of Tadanori Yokoo in Tokyo. All of these individuals have been defined against a dominant modernism, undermining claims of its supposed totality, while at the same time are reinscribed within the modern "tradition" itself as evidence of its inherent eclecticism. These different individuals, operating in unique contexts and in very different ways, signal a departure from the kind of modernism Philip Meggs calls an "International Typographic Style." Their work responds to the particularity of its context and cannot be conveniently categorized under one prevailing style. In fact, the only cohesion that this range of work allows is one based on their difference from a relatively undifferentiated or homogenous modernism.

DAN FRIEDMAN'S RADICAL MODERNISM

It is against this background of elusive terms and ill-defined concepts surrounding work produced in the last twenty years that Dan Friedman tries to carve a space for himself in the present. The spaces that Dan Friedman occupies are undoubtedly unique for this graphic designer-turned-educator-turned-corporate image consultant-turned-artist-cum-furniture designer-cum-graphic designer-turned-educator again. It is this circular trajectory that creates the most difficulty in placing Friedman in context.

It is instructive that Friedman carefully distances himself from post-

What is at issue for me is not whether Friedman can present himself "on his own terms" so to speak; he clearly can and does. What might be more revealing is why such a maneuver is necessary and what such a concept represents.

Andrew Blauvelt

modernism, and instead classifies himself as exemplary of "radical modernism," a term he coins. What is at issue for me is not whether Friedman can present himself "on his own terms" so to speak; he clearly can and does. What might be more revealing is why such a maneuver is necessary and what such a concept represents. For Friedman, it was his decision to become a member of Pentagram and his ensuing identity campaigns for large corporations that signaled the end of the idealism surrounding modernism through its "cooption" by business. (p.114)

It is the very notion of idealism that provides the conceptual pivot around which Friedman can differentiate radical modernism from both modernism and postmodernism: "Radical Modernism is my reaffirmation of the idealistic roots of our modernity, adjusted to include more of our diverse cultures." (p.11) The utopian spirit found in the philosophies of early modernism (e.g., the social egalitarianism of Constructivism, the spiritual harmony of de Stijl, or the technological optimism of the Bauhaus) provides Friedman with a legacy that is lost and needs to be recovered. According to Friedman, these ideals were "forfeited" by the reduction of modernism to a homogenous form language — a global panacea for representing the multinational corporation. (p.115) Postmodernism is equally unsatisfactory to Friedman because it is profoundly "anti-human," a condition he describes as the "darker side" of postmodernism, full of "cynicism, nihilism, and pessimism."(p.115) The selective nature of the modernist project for
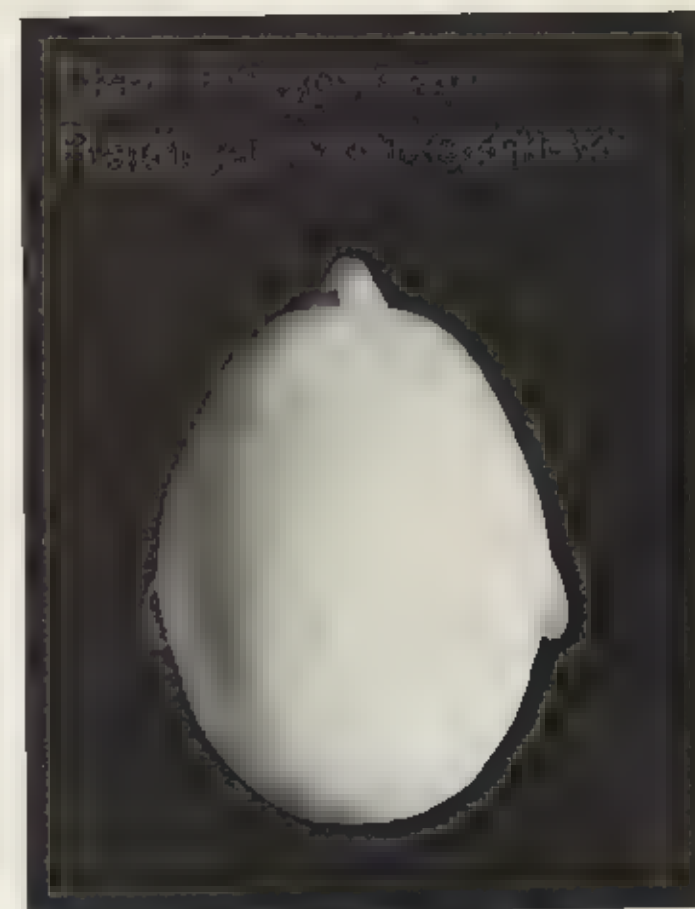
Dan Friedman: Radical Modernism

A review by Victor Margolin

When I present Dan Friedman's work in my design history survey, I introduce him as a Swiss revisionist. After all, he went to Basel, studied with Wolfgang Weingart, was married for a time to April Greiman (of "I feel typography" fame), and likes Helvetica. His new book, however, makes clear how limited that characterization is and how much more there is to Dan Friedman than his revision of Swiss modernism.

The cover is the first giveaway. The flush left Helvetica letters of the title hover uneasily above a photograph of Friedman from behind, his shaven head tilted back, its rotundity flanked by the tips of his ears and topped by the end of his nose. Dan Friedman is using the Russian Formalist poetic device called "ostranenie" or "making strange." His head looks like a lemon with slits in its sides. The typography is day-glo orange - a color that must have Emil Ruder turning over in his grave. The brazen color is repeated on the spine, where it serves as the ground for the august Yale University Press logo designed by Paul Rand. Clearly, Dan Friedman has something up his sleeve.

His book — a treasure trove of his graphic design, furniture, and art — documents his voyage of self-discovery. The author has traveled far from his Ulm/Basel days to the carnivalesque atmosphere of Lower Manhattan. The late Keith Haring was a good friend and collaborator, as are and were various photographers, fashion designers, and artists. The book is filled with work that reflects this milieu. One of my favorite

Dan Friedman: Radical Modernism
BY DAN FRIEDMAN
WITH ESSAYS BY JEFFREY DEITCH,
STEVEN HOLT, AND ALESSANDRO MENDINI.
1994. 223 PAGES. 183 COLOR PLATES,
24 BLACK AND WHITE ILLUSTRATIONS
Published by
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

[43]

Friedman leaves aside other programs of the historical avant-garde, including aspects of Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, which in their respective ways disclose a certain "dark side" of their own.

The uniqueness of radical modernism lies in its recuperation of an idealistic modernism while laying claim to the critique of Eurocentrism provided by postmodern theory, expressed in Friedman's qualification: "...adjusted to include more of our diverse cultures." Accordingly, the invention of radical modernism serves to reconcile only the "good" (idealism and diversity), while purging the "bad" (pessimism and uniformity). It is in this space, between the modern and the postmodern, where Friedman must articulate a position that reconciles the opposites. Friedman's "agenda for optimism" represents this reconciliation: where the idealism of modernism overcomes the pessimism of postmodernism and where postmodern diversity (read as pluralism) overcomes a homogenous modernism.

Friedman's idea of radical modernism holds within it a profound "optimism" to see design understood in much broader social and cultural terms, to express personal and spiritual values in the face of domination, to advocate projects that advance the public good, to embrace the richness of all cultures, and so on. (p.209) While these are laudable goals, we are left without a strategy for how these might be achieved, only that they need to be done. Friedman's radical modernism for graphic design is largely a projection — a potentiality based on larger shifts in the practice of graphic design that Friedman attributes to a more critical discussion about design issues and a move away from the hedonism associated with 1980's excess and toward social responsibility. (p.27)

However, it is in the work of Dan Friedman the artist that we can begin to understand how some of this agenda is achieved. In fact, the furniture design and constructed environments of Friedman during the 1980s provide insights into his articulation of radical modernism as his resolution of modern problems and postmodern challenges. One vestige of modernism can be found in Friedman's reliance on an avant-gardist position as a way to "challenge the status quo." So reliant is Friedman on this strategy that he even analogizes the designer's role to that of the artist when he concludes: "Moreover, our marginalized position may inspire us, like artists, to function once again as cultural provocateurs."(p.27) Indeed, Friedman describes himself as an "artist whose subject is design and culture."(p.11) The effectiveness of such an oppositional prac-
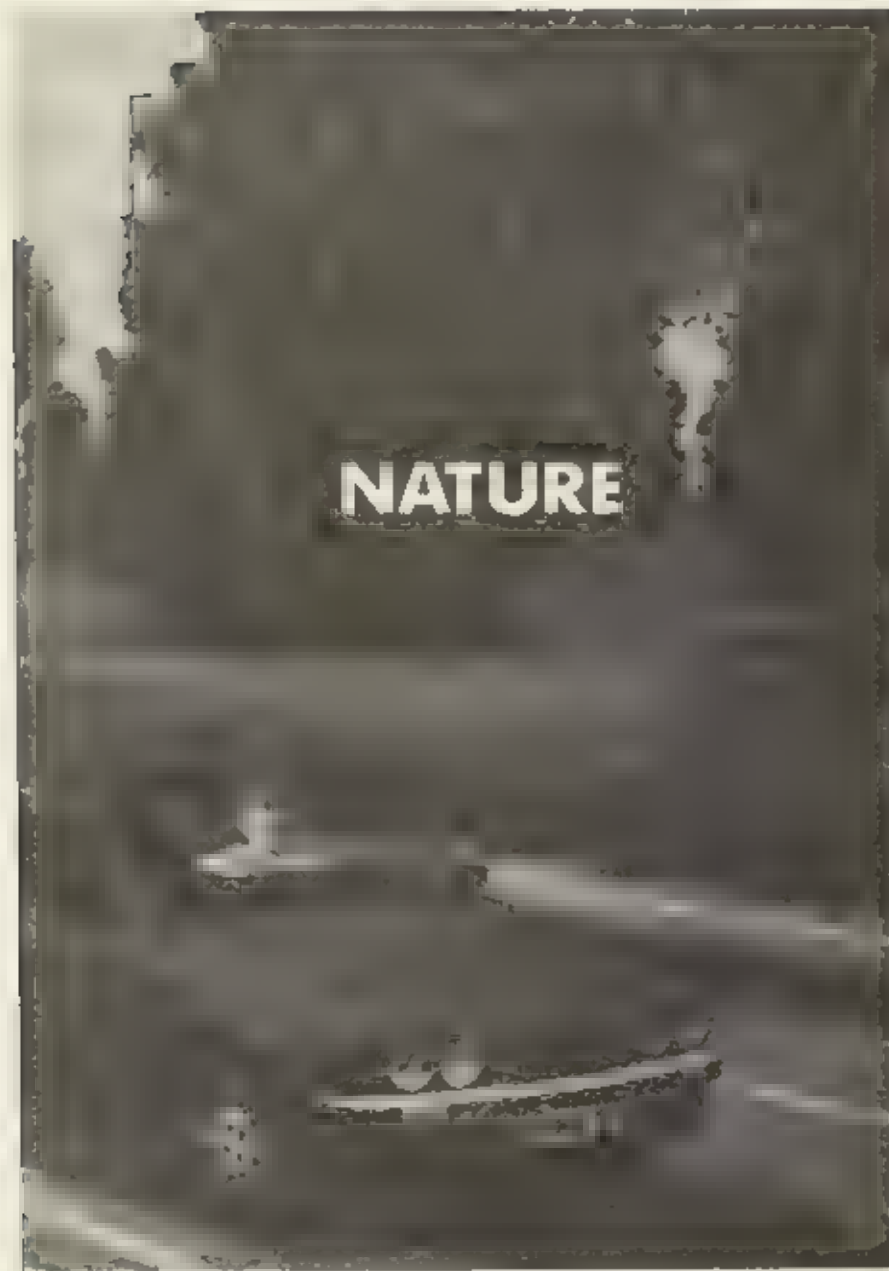
The uniqueness of radical modernism lies in its recuperation of an idealistic modernism while laying claim to the critique of eurocentrism provided by postmodern theory.

Andrew Blauvelt

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Cover, *Artificial Nature*, (1990).
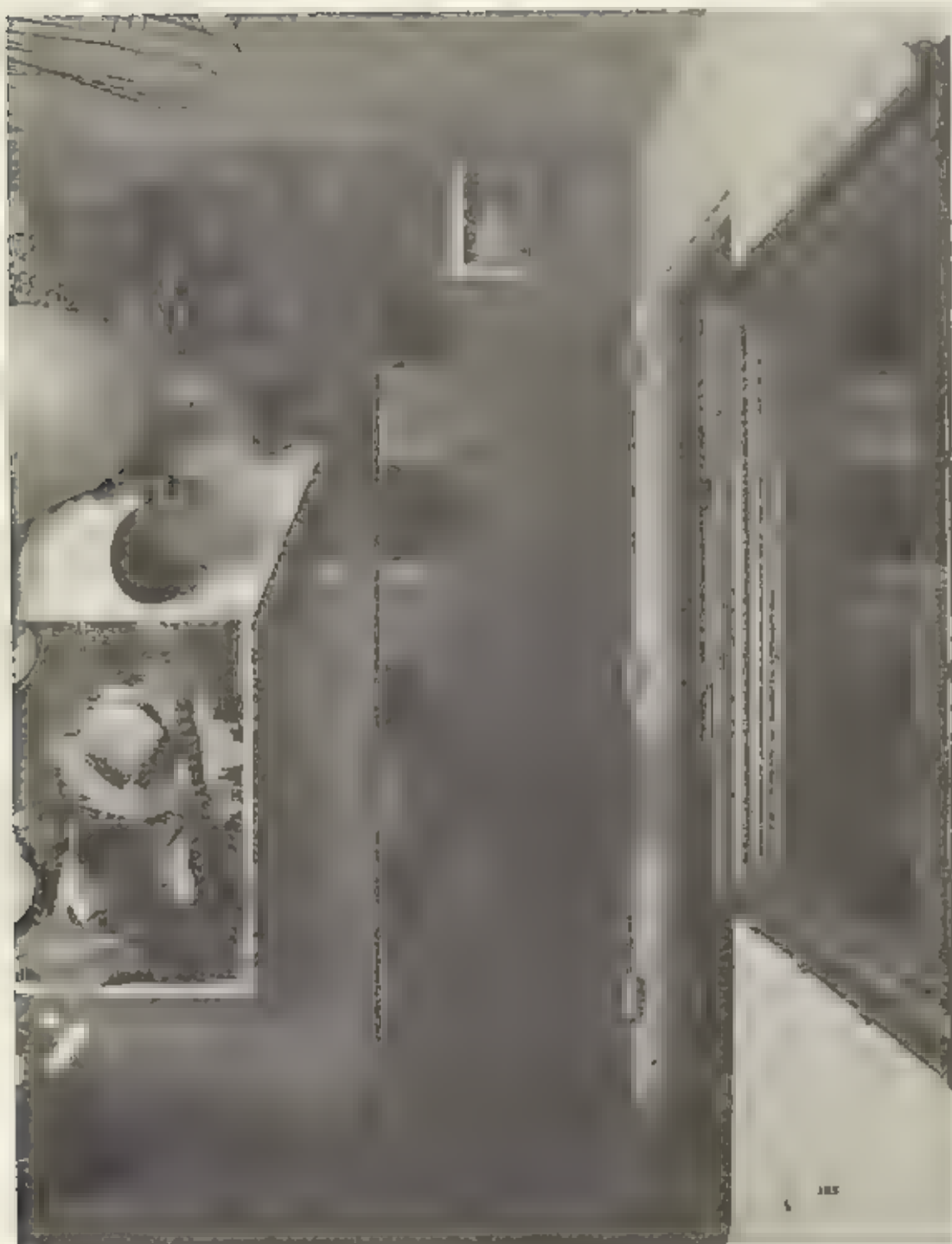
Entrance to Dan Friedman's New York City apartment (1991).

The Hanover Merzbau, a lifework in the home of Kurt Schwitters (1943).
Photograph courtesy of the Sprengel Museum in Hanover.

tice in this day and age, when the appropriative powers of the status quo can nullify such challenges goes unexplained by Friedman. Alessandro Mendini and Steven Holt, writing in tribute to Friedman in his book, regard Friedman's apartment-as-installation as his artistic tour-de-force. As a work in perpetual progress, Friedman uses the walls, ceilings, floors and furniture of his apartment as his canvas that he paints with a full spectrum, vividly saturated and highly patterned color palette. Friedman successfully transforms three-dimensional space into two-dimensional image with the reduction of form to surface. There could be no better metaphor for postmodernism than this notion of surface — a depthlessness occasioned by the triumph of the image. This reduction to surface obscures the operations of dominant culture; this depthlessness moves us further from understanding social realities that could generate dissent. Therefore, we can *appear* radical without being radical. Despite its militaristic connotations, the avant-garde has apparently left the streets to do battle in the home.

A second vestige of modernist practice can be located within Friedman's notion of cultural diversity, which Friedman interprets as "another expression of modern eclecticism."(p.97) Friedman adopts the usual critique of modernism as an exclusionary, Eurocentric practice, but reads diversity as a way of enlarging the formal vocabulary of modernism by referencing other cultural

A REVIEW BY VICTOR MARGOLIN

projects is Friedman's catalog for Haring's first exhibition at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in 1982. The magenta cover with a three-eyed Haring cartoon face on it leads into a series of spreads, variously printed on white or yellow stock, that vary text, full-page photographs of the artist, and reproductions of his work in a visually compelling sequence. The Haring catalog is modest, however, compared to other examples of Friedman's "wild style," which is best exemplified by his splendid multicolored screens whose angular shapes, mask-like surfaces, and extravagant ornaments evoke a strange mix of New York day-glo culture and African tribal art.

Friedman tells us more than once in this book how limiting it is to do only one thing. He notes that premature specialization in schools perpetuates a similar isolation in practice and works against the hybridization that is increasingly desirable in real professions.

His multifaceted career, however, is not without precedent in American design culture. Charles and Ray Eames moved from architecture to furniture and then to films and exhibitions, the office of Massimo and Lella Vignelli has combined a strong graphic design practice with projects for dramatic furniture and showrooms, and Milton Glaser, whose grounding is in illustration as well as graphic design, is known for some outstanding restaurant interiors and an entire theme park, Sesame Place.

The graphic designs of Massimo Vignelli and Glaser have maintained their hallmark signature over the years and their projects in other fields have also extended this easily recognizable identity. But Dan Friedman's path differs from his predecessors' because the changes he has made in his work are so extreme and appear to be

closely bound up with deep changes in his own life. Friedman has refused to let a single aesthetic strategy dominate his work. Even his early typographic projects, such as the logo and posters for the New Haven Dance Theater, combine mystery, ambiguity, and playfulness with a strong sense of order. This commitment to structure is less obvious in later projects such as his "Mutant Chair," made from pieces found in the garbage, or the expressive cabinets and tables he designed for Neotu in Paris, but nothing Friedman does ever lapses into visual chaos.

He calls his design philosophy "radical modernism," which he defines as "a reaffirmation of the idealistic roots of our modernity, adjusted to include more of our diverse culture, history, research, and fantasy." His approach is eminently reasonable and certainly responds to the mix of tastes, styles, and ethnicities that have asserted a presence within our emerging vision of global culture. It is

[46]

sources. Diversity becomes pluralism and aesthetic eclecticism. Difference is rel-ativized and power seemingly equalized through cultural appropriation in a modernist gesture reminiscent of primitivism.

"...a more disquieting quality of modernism [is] its taste for appropriating or redeeming

otherness, for constituting non-Western arts in its own image, for discovering universal, ahistorical

'human' capacities."

James Clifford, HISTORIES OF THE TRIBAL AND THE MODERN, *The Predicament of Culture*, p.193

Friedman searches the globe for the lost spiritualism of modern life and finds it, not surprisingly, in the artifacts (West African huts or Caribbean chicken coops) and rituals of the less industrialized cultures he visits – places increasingly facing the encroachment of consumer culture.

"Driving on a quiet road near a mountain village in Puerto Rico, I encountered a cluster of small

buildings that included a makeshift beauty parlor, a combination garage/pool room, and a

chicken coop....The buildings' visual form was vaguely reminiscent of the collages of Kurt Schwitters,

Picasso's sculpture, Robert Rauschenberg's assemblages, and even the architecture of Frank Gehry."

Dan Friedman, CUSTOMIZED ECLECTICISM, *Radical Modernism*, p.94.

Friedman's limited edition art furniture and sculptures serve as sites for the incorporation and amalgamation of disparate cultural references. For example, his Three Mile Island Lamp of 1985 merges a kitsch souvenir postcard of the infamous power plant with bric-a-brac talismans and a grass skirt, or Bamboo Curtain, also from 1985, a folding screen painted with the colors and patterns of African kente cloth. In these works and many others, it is the artist who serves as the great equalizer of cultural diversity, the one who is capable of incorporating such diversity not for the promotion of any particular culture but for the assertion of the unique vision of the "provocateur."

Dan Friedman's return to graphic design is marked by his design of catalogs for exhibitions curated by Jeffrey Deitch and sponsored by the Deste Foundation during the late 1980s and early 1990s. These catalog designs have been widely reproduced and are used to illustrate a return to a more con-trolled, minimal approach to typography, inspired by artists such as Barbara Kruger, who appropriated the look from mass media advertising. In this way, Friedman's designs are heralded in their difference from current postmodern work.

"...[this new work] is nourished by many of the same influences as more complex post-modern work.

The fundamental difference lies in the nature of the designer's conclusions....It is old-fashioned

and quite un-post-modern in the sense that it believes that it is possible to transmit intelligible

Three Mile Island Lamp (1985).

meaning, even when the topic is difficult or for that matter post-modern, and that it is the designer's job to make the message as clear as it can be."

Rick Poynor, WHATEVER BECAME OF THE CONTENT?, *Eye*, No.9, Vol.3, p.6 .

As exhibition catalogs, they transcend the usual offerings in this genre, choosing to use lavish full-color reproductions in a photo-essay format that, ironically, adds depth to much of the textual discussion and artists' works. The topics of these books are a virtual repertoire of postmodern art practices and themes: *Cultural Geometry* of 1988 draws parallels between the "Neo-Geo" art work of people like Jeff Koons and ancient Greek pottery, while serving up commentary on the banal nature of life in a global consumer culture. *Artificial Nature* of 1990 focuses on the blurring of nature and culture, the real and the human-made, where images of Wizard air freshener and Disney's fake Matterhorn get equal time with the artworks of Ashley Bickerton and Andy Warhol. The third installment, *Post Human* of 1992, combines the earlier themes of consumerism and artificiality in work about the post-human body. All three exhibitions and the artwork they highlight exude the kind of pessimism, cynicism and nihilism that Friedman rejects as anti-human or "dark" postmodernism. Despite this irony, it is Friedman's intimate involvement in the process of writing, editing and designing the catalogs with the curator — his redefinition of the conventional role of the designer and not his restrained typographic palette — that

A REVIEW BY VICTOR MARGOLIN

only the old soldiers of the modern movement and their devotees who refuse to see this.

New York and Milan have provided fertile soil for Friedman's talents as a furniture designer to flower. Unlike his graphic design, which remains rooted in his German and Swiss training despite the intense and expressive quality that he now brings to it, his furniture quickly took its place in the tradition of Italian radical design created by such groups as Archizoom and Studio Alchymia. While Friedman has found manufacturers for some of his pieces in Italy and France, he pushes beyond the constraints of multiple production to produce many individual pieces as well. It is these pieces, such as his "Primal Screen," (1984) made of fiberboard, raffia, and rope, that best show us the outer edge of Friedman's cultural sensibility. "Primal Screen" makes strong reference to African tribal rituals, as evidenced by the four separate pieces that suggest both headdresses and personified dancers with raffia skirts. The forms are varied and the colors intense. The pattern, however, is strongly based on geometric shapes, the one vestige of Basel that this project retains. "Green Screen" (1984) combines a mask made of pieces of wood painted in green, red, yellow, and black, with an enlarged Smurf head. Despite the eclectic formal and semantic elements in these screens, Friedman remains a master of visual syntax based on a severe system of order.

As much as order is a part of his system, however, Friedman gets frustrated when there is too much of it. In his Citibank identity program, done while he was associated with Anspach Grossman Portugal Inc., he tried to push the expressive possibilities of an international bank's identity by providing opportunities to vary the scale, layouts, and colors of different projects. In one of the essays on Friedman in the book, Jeffrey Deitch, a former art curator at Citibank, notes that some of the older managers resisted Friedman's design and preferred to give out their old business cards instead. In an essay of his own, Life, Style, and Advocacy, which was published in the *AIGA Journal*, Friedman lamented the subordination of modern design to corporate demands. He expressed his admiration for older designers like Armin Hoffman, Paul Rand, and George Nelson, whom he saw as fusing their design practice with a personal lifestyle.

That goal has intensified for Friedman and accounts for his disillusion with corporate design. His own attempt to fuse art and life, however, does not at all follow the model of his mentors. Friedman's definition of "radical modernism" has led him to explore areas of culture that are far beyond the bounds his

begins to make a claim for the radical; when his professional transgressions outpace his cultural appropriations.

This process of describing the dynamics of inscription is meant to be understood in ways beyond a critique of Dan Friedman. Friedman and his work serve as an excellent example with which to understand this process, but the criticisms could just as easily apply to other designers. The need to stake out claims and to assert autonomy is simply part of the system of promotion and validation that has come to legitimate graphic design, and the designer monograph is one more (un)necessary part of it. What is refreshing about Friedman is his desire to place himself within the current debates about design and not to simply castigate others. In this way, Friedman transcends the generational divide surrounding recent debates in design. While an older generation waxes nostalgic about modernism, a younger generation of designers, such as myself, were born into and educated in the period of the postmodern. For us, as for Friedman, graphic design is fraught with the contradictions that we were schooled in and, offered no other choice, must live by. If the idealism of modernism was nothing less than the social transformation of life, the logic of postmodernism is nothing less than the tactics of resisting social domination. How's that for optimism?

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A REVIEW BY VICTOR MARGOLIN

mentors found acceptable. This exploration is particularly refreshing in light of the hard line positions taken by Rand and Vignelli, two men who should be more open to the work of young practitioners. Rand argued in his last book, *Design, Form, and Chaos,* that graphic design and politics are two separate spheres, while Vignelli, who unabashedly asserts his leftist credentials, rails ad infinitum against the sea of chaos and kitsch that surrounds his tight little island of purity. Neither position has proved attractive to younger designers, who are immersed in political issues from AIDS to homelessness, and are eager as well to engage more intensely with the rich and diverse visual milieu that is emerging from the closer contacts among the peoples of the world. At the same time, Friedman's quest to merge art and life must certainly fall on sympathetic ears among younger designers. We clearly live in a moment when the need for a strong personality to confront and assimilate the extremities of contemporary experience is essential.

Even a seasoned avant-garde designer like Alessandro Mendini, who for years helped to define the outer edges of Italian design culture while also editing some of the culture's most influential magazines such as *Domus, Casabella,* and *Modo,* has written enviously of Friedman's ability to function as "a spatial actor in the universe of himself." This remark was prompted by Mendini's visit to Friedman's apartment on the 15th floor of a Greenwich Village high-rise, which Friedman has made into a visual laboratory that has changed many times since the early 80s. In this book, the apartment interior, seen in various incarnations, functions as a set of semaphores to mark Friedman's personal transformations. The intensity of this kaleidoscopic space inevitably recalls Kurt Schwitters' incredible Merzbau, the never-ending wooden sculpture that the German artist constructed over many years in a room of his house in Hanover. Like Friedman, Schwitters did many things. He wrote witty poems and essays, created marvelous collages out of junk found in trash bins (a source Friedman plunders for some of his furniture), polemicized about typography and advertising, and supported himself with a graphic design agency. Schwitters' activity as an advertising designer is usually subordinated by critics and art historians to his work as an artist, as if art history can't manage someone who also sullies his hands with commercial projects. This is a situation that Dan Friedman seeks to avoid.

Unfortunately, the problem of categories is still with us and has not helped us to understand Dan Friedman in all his fullness. However, this problem seems to be more American than European, which may explain

why Dan Friedman has been so successful as an artist abroad. His furniture and ceramics have been produced in limited editions by Neotu in France and Arredaesse and Alessi in Italy, and he has a number of collectors of his one off pieces in both countries, as well as in Japan.

Mendini speaks of Friedman's projects in all media as "figurations of his own philosophy." We see a particular example of this in the catalogs that Friedman has co-edited and designed for a series of exhibitions curated by Jeffrey Deitch. In these catalogs – *Artificial Nature, Cultural Geometry*, and *Post-Human* – Friedman explores new relations between pictures and texts to address complex and controversial issues of contemporary culture. He engages with images in a way that makes greater reference to the work of visual artists like Barbara Kruger and Christian Marclay than to the traditional conventions of image use in graphic design. In fact, Friedman's reading of images and his layouts based on it is decidedly postmodern, rather than radically modern, in its use of irony and in his intention to undermine visual conventions. Both *Artificial Nature* and *Post-Human* address the blurring of boundaries between the modernist categories of nature and artifice, one of the crucial themes of contemporary thought. Friedman seems to support the postmodern position that the distinctions between these boundaries have collapsed. Such a position differs from the dialectical tension between order and diversity on which he predicates his definition of "radical modernism." It would seem, despite the wondrous transformations that Friedman has made in his life and work, that dialectics – the mutual engagement of different positions – is central to his philosophy, rather than a notion of total fluidity. Just as he does not abandon his Swiss training when he does his "wild design," neither does he give himself up wantonly to the polymorphous culture of Lower Manhattan. Friedman remains a man of reason who opens himself up continually to new experiences but then processes them within a personality that strives for coherence and order.

We see this tendency in the organization of his book, which is neatly divided into sections that account for his different interests. Chapters entitled "Mental Furniture," "Wild Design," and "Customized Eclecticism" are all separated from his discussions of typographic theory and what he calls "Reasonably Coherent Systems." This separation into categories is part of Friedman's dialectical nature, which he continually seeks to unify through different combinations of reason and wildness.

The adventure that Friedman narrates for us in this book is well worth our attention. His ability to construct a life from the overwhelming sea of opportunities around him is inspiring and reinforces the old argument that a designer's most important asset is the ability to think independently and creatively. Friedman has broken all the molds and has shown us that it can be done with excitement and a joie de vivre that in no way minimize a serious engagement with social problems and issues. This is a book about optimism and inventiveness. It should encourage others to break down the separation of art and life as Friedman has done.

Cover, *Post Human* (1992).

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"It is worth trying a brutally simple attitude to design:
judge it by its content... But, having announced the
simple criterion of 'content,' one then has to explore the
ways in which content is mediated by, is inseparable
from, the forms in which we find it."

- Robin Kinross, *Fellow readers: notes on multiplied language* [1]

Know Questions Asked

A dialogue with fellow readers: notes on multiplied language
Anne Burdick / Louise Sandhaus / Rudy VanderLans

"Architecture [design, writing]... is not the simple container,
but a place that shapes matter, that has a performative
action on whatever inhabits it..."

- Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: the Writings of Georges Bataille* [2]

1. Robin Kinross, *Fellow readers: notes on multiplied language*,
p 26-27, London Hyphen Press 994
2. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*,
p x, Cambridge, MA. MIT Press, 1989

[[Louise > Anne: Here's a little quip from my fave, Laurie Anderson, to get us in the mood [;-D]: In "Stories from the Nerve Bible," Laurie talks about traveling through Europe during the Gulf War and how, because of the hyper-security, they'd make her demonstrate her electronic equipment at the airport security checkpoints. She describes one occasion when the security people pointed to something - a filter - and asked what it was. Laurie responded: "This is what I like to think of as the voice of authority" and went on to explain that she uses it "for songs about various forms of control." Then they asked her why she'd "want to talk like that?" She looked around at all the equipment, the agents, the swat teams and said "Take a wild guess."³]]

Know Questions Asked

3. *Culture on the Brink*, ed Gretchen Bender and Timothy Drucker, Seattle· Bay Press, 1994, p 225.

4. Quoted by Jan van Toorn in THINKING DESIGN: ISSUES IN CULTURE AND VALUE from the exhibition catalog for *Consuming the Image: Appetite for Meaningful Design*, Western Carolina University, 1993, p 4

"It's not what you say, but how you say it" said Ronald Reagan⁴, the man whose mastery of powerful images put him in power. But are we savvy enough now to see the connection between the image of authority and the authority of the image? Just what is the link between the means and the meaning — the form and its content? "Knowledge is power" as the old adage goes. But wait, this could be read two ways. Knowledge can be "empowering," a word that evokes an image of the small and meek overcoming the mighty and powerful. At the same time, the control of knowledge makes for power that controls, consciously or not. How does knowledge come about? Where does it circulate? In what forms do we find it?

Our discussion here is about exposing the seams that sew authority and knowledge together — undressing the power dressing. As seamstresses who stitch together form and content, creating the garment in which content is clothed, graphic designers have insight into the contrivance of appearance, the patterns for knowledge. Why set ourselves to expose and undermine the means of authority, pointing to ourselves in the process? Because seamless appearances allow authority (which legitimizes knowledge) to seem "natural" in a world whose power relations are out of balance, leaving few dangling threads with which one could unravel and expose what is a constructed get-up, the emperor's new clothes. Ours is a questioning of knowledge made material through communication technologies. whether it be the book, the magazine, the Internet or language itself — the latter two through which this piece was composed.

Robin Kinross   Fellow readers
           notes on multiplied language

bubble of meaning. Something could mean anything, and so quickly it could only mean nothing. And all of this echoed the politics of the time: when a sense of things in common was displaced by free-for-all individualism; and when individual liberty became reduced to freedom to consume – if you had the cash - watched over by forces of the state.

Front cover *Fellow readers* (1994).

[[Anne > Louise: Hey - I think this discussion we've got between these brackets should be kept in - a seam-ripping device. Anne > fellow readers: since I'm in Raleigh, North Carolina, USA and Louise is in Maastricht, the Netherlands, we've been writing this by e.mail whose format gives us no margins to scribble in. So instead we created these roped-off spaces to wrestle with our form and content and sometimes each other. But the most difficult opponent by far was the authoritative voice of our discussion. After much struggle, we lived to tell the story.]]

Know Way

Robin Kinross's pamphlet *Fellow readers: notes on multiplied language* provided us with an ideal stream of typographic and design consciousness (raising?) for us to row down. This publication represents the confluence of power and empowerment: Kinross is the sole creator - writer, designer and publisher, all rolled into one. With magnifying glasses, binoculars, and oars in hand, we'd like to explore the complex connection between design and authority (or *authority*). How does Kinross say what he means and mean what he says?

[[Louise > Anne: which raises the question of how we, that is Anne, Louise and Rudy mean what we say and say what we mean.]]

In *Fellow readers*, Kinross positions typography as a technology for the multiplication of knowledge in the broader context of the political and social body. Against this backdrop, he critiques the use of particular strains of linguistic theory in design practice and attempts to "diagnose the confusions, as they appeared in the world of typographic and graphic design: on paper and on screens." (From the back cover) [5]

Kinross takes designers to task who have been openly influenced by poststructuralism and deconstructivism for having misread the structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in order to justify giving the graphic designer dominance over the reader [6]. Kinross's is an ethical argument over which the participant, along the production line of knowledge, has the right to attempt to control meaning, and by what means.

"Typography is printing made conscious: printing explaining its own secrets with its own means of multiplying text and images. And so typography is part of the long haul of 'enlightenment'; of making knowledge accessible and spreading it, of secularization, of social emancipation."(p 16) [7] For Kinross, the title of his book and central subject, "fellow readers," refers to "the public" that was made possible by the development of printing and hence the common sharing of ideas.

[[Anne > Louise: more specifically, those ideas that were deemed worthy of reproduction and distribution!]]

"Printing could for the first time provide a steady and reliable means for the spreading and sharing of knowledge."(p.10) This exchange of knowledge was (is) essential to the democratic principles of "equality of rights and privileges"[8] founded on En-

5. As other folks have taken up the topic, we'll put aside the controversy surrounding Kinross s understanding of what he calls poststructuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism and his tour through how these ideas have been instituted in practice. (See specifically, Andrew Blauvelt, DEFENDING THE READER'S RIGHTS, *Eye*, No 15, Vol 4, Winter 1994, p 83.)
However we were surprised to discover the extent to which Kinross seemingly, although perhaps not intentionally, straddles both sides of the modernist/post-modernist fence (well, not exactly a fence, more like a line in the sand), giving us many "places from which to respond." (p 24)

6. We would encourage our fellow readers to read the original source material to see what they may bring away — not to pursue a correct final reading, as Kinross hopes to provide — but to open the door and look around, getting a sense of the shifty, complex and often contradictory ideas surrounding the terms modernism, postmodernism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction

7. Kinross continues, "No doubt this thesis is oversimplified and could be infinitely modified with further research." We have picked up Kinross's broad brush, only we paint a slightly different picture.

8. *The Wordsworth Concise English Dictionary,* Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd , 1994, p 64

Simply put, the Enlightenment shifted the locus of truth and knowledge from the church to the human world From philosophy to the novel to scientific discourse, knowledge became the means to an end — the world and all its truths revealed through objectivity, rationality, and human reason

lightenment ideals. The problems of the Enlightenment goal of revealing any and all truth becomes an issue further downstream, but the notion of a functioning democracy as the center of Kinross's arguments deserves a momentary docking. This definition of a democracy is based on an informed public with, as Kinross points out, criticism and dialogue as the two fundamental principles. While we don't disagree with this notion, here's where we'd like to introduce the formal expression of ideas into the discussion: Having the critical tools to understand the forms through which knowledge and ideas are brought into being and disseminated is a crucial part of what it means to be informed, which includes an awareness of design as the facilitator of ideas. Without this consciousness about the production of knowledge, the seams are made invisible and how and where knowledge is produced, and how and why we know what we know, goes unquestioned. As Kinross relates about typography, which is equally germane to design in general: "It is at once entirely widespread in its effects and hidden in its public acknowledgment."(p.23)

[[Louise > Anne: whoa! Look out! we should be wary of the authoritative tactic of discussing "the public" from above, as if "we" folks in the know have some privileged knowledge.

The bubble may have burst now, under the pressure of its own overextension and incoherence. There are more comfortable and kinder-to-the-body fashions now. But we are still living with the effects of airy meaninglessness and power-dressing. This essay is an attempt to diagnose the confusions, as they appeared in the world of typography and

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Back cover *Fellow readers.*

Know How

As graphic designers, we're the filter between the author and the audience — between the idea and its image. As hard as we might try, and as much as we might desire it, the intervention of design on content cannot be made invisible. In giving ideas expression, we sometimes confirm them, sometimes modify them, and sometimes downright contradict them. In the best of worlds we allow the complexities of an idea to find expression. And since content can never be seen free of its expression and the expression is never free of its own ideas, then design can be seen as a process of glomming ideas onto other ideas, forms onto forms, authorship onto authorship.

The relationship between authorship (of knowledge) and authority (over knowledge) is a complex one. When we're authoring a topic we're expected to speak as if we're authorities on our subject — knowledgeable and secure in our positions. We're expected to use a form of writing or design that confirms this — that's identifiable as au-

[55]

thoritative, legitimizing what is said. And significantly, the context — the visual/material manifestation — completes the perception of authority. In this case, *Emigre* is the container from which we (Anne and Louise) speak as writers (about design) and forever more our essay will convey our written message as it is shaped through the filter of Rudy's formal choices. It will also carry the connotations of what it means to be published in *Emigre*: perhaps to be recognized as pertinent to the discussion of graphic design or dismissed as the ravings of a couple of in-groupies.

[[louise > anne: so i guess the best we can do is to chart a little map here, sometimes re-inscribing old territories and hopefully mapping a few new routes - visually and verbally. in other words, questioning the form of authority, not acting as the final authority.]]

[[anne > louise: i was fascinated and terrified when i first got published by how easily and how quickly my ideas were not only set in concrete, but validated, made history. writing is like being thrown into a football game in the second quarter. (i love sports metaphors.) the rules and the game preexist you (like language!); you have to run to keep up. you quote others to legitimatize or "prove" your ideas, then you pass the ball to those who quote you to validate their ideas. the validation, the authority, comes from being published in the first place. but am i running in circles? is this questioning ironically invalidated because it takes place in (an elite?) published forum?!]]

Know What

Following the current (back in our boat, binoculars ready), we surveyed the visual form of *Fellow readers* trying to discover what Robin Kinross, as designer, had to say for himself. We whipped out Kinross's own map, *Modern typography*, to find our way. The first thing we observed was a modernist page layout — asymmetrical grid, unjustified setting — embracing the machine and "an unsentimental rationality"[9]. Looking closer, we noticed that the book was set entirely in the 'Modern' typeface Ehrhardt, which in the 20th century has proven to be a popular, hard-working book face due, in part, to its revival and revision by Stanley Morison and its availability through Monotype. A distinctly Enlightened notion that makes for a good read. We referred to another map, locating his design in the region of the crystal goblet. According to the legend, this indicates his design is neutral, transparent, allowing the (true?) meaning of the words to shine through. There is no intervention nor heavy-handed authoritarian meddling with the text; interpretation is left entirely up to the reader. The form has virtually disappeared.
If we had continued to follow this map, we would have had a head-on collision with the real material form that we ostensibly could not see. We would have been sent reeling

9. Robin Kinross, *Modern typography*, London. Hyphen Press, 1992, p.157

[56]

with its ideas. In other words, once the verbiage is poured into the goblet, it acquires not only the shape, but all the associations we have with the shape, material, and kind of goblet it is, whether gilded gold or Tupperware. We understand the position it occupies in the culture.

At the same time, the goblet that is used so frequently that we no longer take notice might as well be invisible for it is rendered transparent through conventional usage. While we can tell almost at a glance by a book's size, look and feel the difference between Faye Resnick's *Diary of a Life Interrupted*, *The World Book Encyclopedia*, and *The Constitution*, this frequently feels so natural, so common-sensical, so "as it should be" that we don't even think about it, let alone question it.

As these things came into focus, a few signs became visible that weren't on either map. So we pulled out the map called *The Trails of Forms in the General Culture*. We began to see the context in which *Fellow readers* circulated. We saw it on bookshelves and night stands beside other books. We saw its similarity to other authorized forms of expression. We found *Fellow readers* in the legend beside the "Fine Book Typography" icon, signifying a belief in a proper means of expression for texts that claim a position within the body of legitimate and legitimizing institutionalized knowledge.

We found *Fellow readers* again next to the "Quiet Means of Expression with an air or Authority" icon, signifying that the book, through its form, had in fact assumed such a posture.

[[louise > anne: sounds like kinross used the "thoughtful authority" filter.]]

Can the ideological underpinnings of the design of *Fellow readers* be as transparent as the form pretends to be? In THE RHETORIC OF NEUTRALITY,[10] Kinross illustrates how even the most apparently neutral, objective, factual bits of information have a socioeconomic history and carry meaning rooted in a particular ideology. In *Modern typography*, Kinross provides a similar contextual overview for many different typographic languages, from the 'romain du roi' to Swiss Modernism. When designing *Fellow readers*, Kinross had a cupboard full of different vessels, fully aware of their historical roots and contemporary meanings. Therefore, we must ask: Does the visual form Kinross chose

Robin Kinross Fellow readers: notes on multiplied language
Hyphen Press 1994

The feeling of self is only the feeling of the particular being affected
Under the exclusive domination of this feeling, every being is its own universe
The winds blow and the sun shines for it and it alone. It is not the feeling
of self, but the idea of self that carries man out beyond his own individuality
and places him on a level with all other human beings. He is now invested
with a new set of emotions and passions. From being selfish, he has become
social.
James Frederick Ferrier 1849/50

Title page *Fellow readers*

10. Robin Kinross, THE RHETORIC OF NEUTRALITY, *Design Issues* ed by Victor Margolin, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp 131-143

[57]

stand in contradiction to his discussion of Enlightenment ideals, printing and typography in *Fellow readers*?

[[anne > louise: a little quip about roland barthes and the health issue: for barthes, the healthy sign is that which does not attempt to mask its presence as a sign, doesn't pass itself off as natural, transparent. the cloak of neutrality is, for him, authoritarian and therefore unhealthy. it's the disease of power and control. while clean living, clean thoughts, and kinross's clean design may be somehow pure, they may not all be healthy. sanitary makes sense where the corporeal is concerned, but it masks a deception when words and images are put to paper or screen. where are the smudges, the seams?]]

Know Questions Asked

In the Know

"All this fire-breathing polemic seems to lead merely to a plea for graphic designers to be allowed to make their presence known," Kinross says. (p 31) Well, yes and no. If Kinross means that we just want a bit of fame, a role in the foreground in exchange for our long hours, while we may not mind that, it's hardly worth the pages of *Emigre*. But if "making our presence known" is about initiating a critical discussion about the designer's role in shaping what constitutes knowledge, then this is hopefully more than a MERE plea for recognition.

Can this discourse take place within the formal language of graphic design and typography? The designer presence to which Kinross refers is made known through visual strategies (as opposed to mention in the colophon); typography that is somehow disruptive, refusing to recede into the background of transparent convention". In this work the form — the visual signifier — draws attention to itself via one device or another, and could be read as bringing the designer to the foreground. Kinross's interpretation is that the goal of this work is to direct one reading (the designer's) as opposed to another (The author? The reader?). But couldn't it also be read as a "deeper argument about social effects, about the place of the designer" (p 31), by revealing its own constructedness and the constructedness of any *authorized* reading?

Either way, the limitations of a strategy of disruption become apparent when considered in the context of our particular historical moment. The rapid circulation of forms in our culture makes it difficult for disruptive/ subversive/alternative maneuvers to retain that connotation. Even the meaning of the more subtle gestures that have appeared in book and catalog design, where the reader hardly notices the form until a sly move such as a little line of type gone astray, destabilizes and thus

Know Where?

[[anne > louise: I was thinking — as I was downloading your e mail and converting it to Microsoft Word, changing the font and point size to the ones I prefer — about the irony of writing about the relationship between content and form in a medium in which the form is completely malleable and left up to the reader/receiver (11 pt. Courier, by the way — to signify work in progress — a kind of fuzzy nostalgia for the typewriter. Come to think of it, the students I'm teaching now don't really have that same connection and over time any typeset text might signify malleability, work in progress, since typesetting will no longer contain the mysteries of its production, thanks to the computer.) Our content is digital information – does it exist without a material form prior to encountering a reader/receiver? Yes, I guess, because we have the alphabet and punctuation to work with — that's our language-made-material.]]

[[louise > anne: This brings up the big question about the World-Wide Web, too -- where, at least for now, everything looks more or less equivalent regardless of what it is, you end up scrolling through lists of lists of lists. Here's the jumble of design-related thoughts this brought up: If everything had the same expression, would that be considered democratic? It makes me wonder, how much of what something means comes through what it looks like? Writing this via e.mail has really revealed the complexities of form and content and where design intervenes in the meaning-giving process. This makes me think about the three gloms: 1 First you have the expressive capacity of words, then 2. you glom on the expression of ideas through structural writing form, then 3. the expression of ideas through the forms of typography/typeface and typographic layout and design. Whew! That's a heap of stuff!]]

[[anne > louise: Can we talk about these things only having 1 and 2 to work with when we're really going to be talking about 1 2, and 3? I was thinking about this when I came across Kinross's statement on page 15 about the casual language of e mail and the need for — I don't know what — the formality of printing? The regulated use of proper English? Here's the quote: "One already noticeable effect is that an informal, unedited style which goes with private communication is spreading into multiplied communication. Electronic mail is fine; but not if this becomes the model for all communication. The formality that multiplication and publication demands of a text carries a social function."]]

[[louise > anne: Yeah, it keeps everybody in line.]]

11. While our description here is very generalized (Kinross neglects to show the specific work to which he is referring) we are attempting to discuss strategies as opposed to actual formal manifestations found within certain work that is pertinent to Kinross's discussion and our own. We are not concerned with critiquing the success or failure of the expressed motivation behind such form making, rather discussing the way such form circulates in the culture We would also like to point out the degree of overlap between Kathy McCoy, Jeff Keedy, et al s "fire-breathing polemic" and Kinross's "deeper arguments about social effects" (p.31)
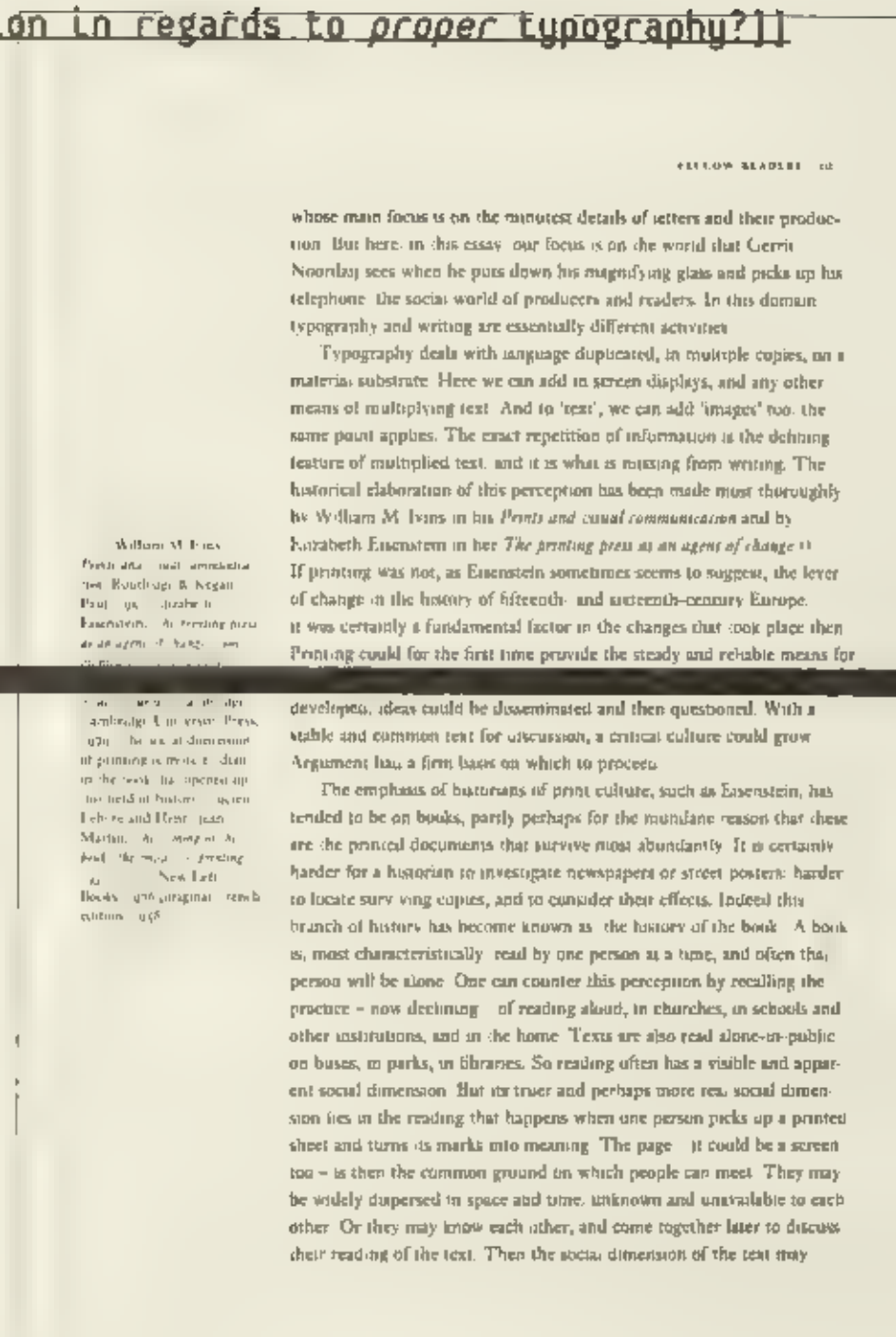
[58]

brings their expectations to the fore, depends on such expectations remaining constant across all audiences. While we fellows may meet on common ground, we in no way make up a homogeneous community that remains constant over time.

Perhaps we're asking too much from form alone. For this to be more than a "fire-breathing polemic," shouldn't it be extended into the public spheres where its significance is directed? In what forms/forums could this take place? In the section "Talking in Public,"(p.21) Kinross poses these same difficult questions, with a slightly different focus from ours.

[[anne > louise: isn't his more about public education in regards to *proper* typography?]]

"While printing is a prime means of enlightenment and demystification, discussion of it has tended to be the preserve of specialists..."(p 21) Looking at several small books on typography criticism by authors such as John Ryder and Erik Spiekermann, Kinross discusses the contradiction between the public arguments put forth and the precious books in which the arguments appear.

He goes on to ask, "Could typography be a topic of regular and intelligent discussion in newspapers?"(p.21) Perhaps. Some of the ideas in this essay began, for Louise, as a letter she wrote to *The New York Times Book Review*, a call for acknowledgment of the graphic designer's role in affecting the positioning and interpretation of a text. She wrote, "While I don't want to suggest that the designer's contribution is equivalent to the writer's, I do want to offer that design, as the expression of content, is another form of authorship." But the letter was never completed, for the forms of knowledge have become so naturalized, so invisible, as we've already discussed, that the difficulty of relating this idea to the general readership of a publication such as *The New York Times Book Review* kept her from completing it. Besides, in a climate of pervasive skepticism, it seemed equally absurd to her to heap design onto what must already seem to be an overly deconstructed world. But if we are going to argue for the significance of design in giving face to that world, of shaping what we know and how we know it, then designers will need to find a way to speak visually and/or verbally to and as fellow readers.

[59]

whose main focus is on the minutest details of letters and their production. But here in this essay our focus is on the world that Gerrit Noordzij sees when he puts down his magnifying glass and picks up his telephone: the social world of producers and readers. In this domain typography and writing are essentially different activities.

Typography deals with language duplicated, in multiple copies, on a material substrate. Here we can add in screen displays, and any other means of multiplying text. And to 'text', we can add 'images' too: the same point applies. The exact repetition of information is the defining feature of multiplied text, and it is what is missing from writing. The historical elaboration of this perception has been made most thoroughly by William M. Ivins in his *Prints and casual communication* and by Elizabeth Eisenstein in her *The printing press as an agent of change*.[11] If printing was not, as Eisenstein sometimes seems to suggest, the lever of change in the history of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe, it was certainly a fundamental factor in the changes that took place then. Printing could for the first time provide the steady and reliable means for

developed, ideas could be disseminated and then questioned. With a stable and common text for discussion, a critical culture could grow. Argument had a firm basis on which to proceed.

The emphasis of historians of print culture, such as Eisenstein, has tended to be on books, partly perhaps for the mundane reason that these are the printed documents that survive most abundantly. It is certainly harder for a historian to investigate newspapers or street posters: harder to locate surviving copies, and to consider their effects. Indeed this branch of history has become known as the history of the book. A book is, most characteristically, read by one person at a time, and often that person will be alone. One can counter this perception by recalling the practice – now declining – of reading aloud, in churches, in schools and other institutions, and in the home. Texts are also read alone-in-public on buses, in parks, in libraries. So reading often has a visible and apparent social dimension. But its truer and perhaps more real social dimension lies in the reading that happens when one person picks up a printed sheet and turns its marks into meaning. The page – it could be a screen too – is then the common ground on which people can meet. They may be widely dispersed in space and time, unknown and unavailable to each other. Or they may know each other, and come together later to discuss their reading of the text. Then the social dimension of the text may

Page *Fellow readers*

William M. Ivins
Prints and visual communication
(1953; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953); Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The printing press as an agent of change...*

...acknowledge Eisenstein's Press, 1979)... he set at dimension of printing is more a... claim in the book has opened up the field of history... system Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'apparition du livre* (1958; *The coming of the book*, New Left Books, 1976)(original translation 1958)

[[anne > Louise: I just met with the Dutch designer, Felix Janssens. Thanks for sending him my way! He showed me a book project he had designed for the *NRC Handelsblad*, a Dutch newspaper, which raised some provocative and pragmatic questions in regard to these issues. The book was published in honor of a prominent Dutch politician who had recently passed away. Felix said he was floored to learn of the symbiotic relationship between politicians and journalists. While this is perhaps not new information, it was the extent to which their livelihoods were interdependent — they traveled and ate together, made stories together, made career opportunities happen for one another. Objective journalism at its best. I asked Felix if he felt some responsibility to make this somehow evident in the book as a service to the fellow readers, the critical inquiring minds who want to know. Of course he did. But how could he? He was employed by a newspaper whose livelihood depended on their image of objective authority. In no way did they want to incriminate themselves and undermine that authority. Felix conveyed what he could through the selection and juxtaposition of certain photographs that lent themselves to a critical reading - to the reader/viewer who was looking for it. But it was so incredibly subtle.
Through our jobs, graphic designers get to peek and poke around the insides of authority. If Felix were to publish an essay or write a letter to the editor or attempt to share what he had learned with a general audience, he might compromise his position as a professional dependent upon the authorities that be for his livelihood. What to do? Where to do it?]]

Should this questioning of the forms of authority be taken up by the formal education system — the source through which we encounter the knowledge of the learned world and what it deems of value? Take, for example, high school English classes, where we are taught about authors who produce this important thing called "literature." We're seldom taught the history of this distinction - literature — or who decides what is literature and what is not. The form in which the literature comes to us — whether as textbooks or as Penguin Classics — reinforces our understanding of how this category is positioned in the culture. We are seldom exposed to what's left out, what hasn't been poured into these goblets of distinction, what is denied expression in our body of knowledge.

[[anne > Louise: yeah, and it's never mentioned how this 'high' distinction is informed by - hell, is dependent upon - publications like the *National Enquirer* in order for its position to have any meaning.]]

Formal education becomes this thing we're supposed to accept; we are seldom encouraged to challenge or question it.

"The critical approach questions: and it questions its own assumptions as part of a refusal to take anything unquestioned. There are no beliefs — not of a golden age nor of transparent communication — that can stand free of these questions and doubts." (p 24) Peeling back the deeper layers of our questions for closer inspection (that magnifying glass really comes in handy!) we uncover and investigate assumptions about truth and language. Looking into the heart of authority that lies beneath these questions, we see it beating with the desire for truth and the Platonic belief that truth is

Know Truth?

expressible through language. The first question that arises is could ideas exist free of any kind of expression? In other words, could there be content without form?

Language is a system of recognizable signs that have no inherent meaning (truth); the signs themselves (not their meaning, as Kinross incorrectly suggests others have said) are arbitrary. Language, whether visual or verbal, is a system of expression of another system by which the world is ordered and explained — a mythology or logic system. (Levi-Strauss, Barthes) Common meaning comes about through usage, association and repetition. The fellow readers, as they are referred to here, are those who commonly understand the language and the symbolic system in which it makes sense. There is no truth, no essence that precedes language (at least none that is attainable through language).

Language, whether through images or through words, is a representation of a representation — an expression of an idea and of its meta-referent, the myth-glue that holds it all together. It is a technology (a form) that enables us to speak, but it is still limited by its own capacity for expression: what gets said is what can be said. (And what can be said is also about what can be published as a circumstance of economics on the one hand and, in the case of public/government-supported work, what will be allowed.) Whoever is able to assume a position whereby they are recognized as authorized to represent and create the signs within the language system controls the world as it is imagined and agreed upon. (J.F. Lyotard/L. Wittgenstein) Toni Morrison describes this most elegantly in her Nobel prize-winning novel, *Beloved*: "Definitions belong to the definers and not to the defined."

[[Louise > anne: The selective quoting device works quite effectively — love to find the perfect quote!]]

[[anne > Louise: I know, when it fits it feels so right. But I almost wanted to move this quote commentary away from this particular quote; we use Morrison's words for their validating factor — well worth noting — but dammit this quote is so valid! coming from someone who has existed outside the power base, it speaks worlds of [dare I say] truth.]]

[[Louise > anne: Here's a story that may help clarify the theory explosion above: The acquittal of the officers accused in the beating of Rodney King, (popularly known as "The Rodney King Trial" even though Rodney King wasn't on trial), sent Los Angeles to the streets, igniting what was called "The L.A. Riots" or the "L.A. Uprising." The shock of the verdict reverberated throughout the U.S.: How was it possible that the jury saw THAT videotape of the beating and still were not able to find the officers guilty? As was widely discussed, the defense attorneys presented a particular description of the action in the videotape that was so convincingly disruptive to the believability of what was being seen, that the jury could not, beyond a reasonable doubt, find the officers guilty — contrary to the full expectation of the media audience/public.

All this serves to demonstrate that even a videotape cannot present truth because it is a representation of an event told from a particular perspective, a filter or a goblet in its own right. The idea of representing the truth is

a paradox: it can't be truth because it's a representation of the truth, so then it's not the truth; except, maybe, the truth of the representation. and in the case of this trial, the truth of the representation was the only factor of significance. and obviously the truth of the representation was fair game! the telling, or representation, of the event was twofold, seen through two different forms: first, the videotape itself and secondly the interpretation of the videotape by the attorneys.]]

[[anne > louise: but few people ever saw only the actual videotape – they saw the videotape contained in the t.v. newsroom goblet. we never saw it free of a reading directed by the t.v. news environment replete with headlines and commentary.]]

Know Way Out

"We started out with beliefs about the world and our place in it that we didn't ask for and didn't question. Only later, when those beliefs were attacked by new experiences that didn't conform to them, did we begin to doubt..." [12]

12. Adrian Piper, IDEOLOGY, CONFRONTATION, AND POLITICAL SELF-AWARENESS, AN ESSAY, *Blasted Allegories*, Brian Wallis, ed., The New Museum of Contemporary Art Cambridge MIT Press, 1987, p 129

The point of all this babbling, ranting, and using our authority for a bit of intellectual persuasion, has been to bring into question the idea of authentic anything, which is to look at the structures of meaning. This is not a call, as Kinross fears, for arbitrary choices of form-making, but a questioning of what it means to give form and to make those choices. Somewhere, we do have a shared world and a shared reality. The question is who and what will be recognized as authentic (having authority) and what will be degraded?

[[louise > anne: whaddya think? any coincidence that a couple of women are writing this?]]

The place that we meet in common is neither innocent nor natural. It is a construction site of power struggles, presence and absence. Form-giving shapes public presence, can veil stakes and motives, hiding the constructedness of our shared world. But increasingly, the locus of communication is through a technology that offers users/senders/readers/receivers the potential to manipulate the form in which visual and verbal language appears to them. Might this allow for a different understanding of what it means to be fellow readers? Could this allow a readership to share a common world - one no longer set in stone (or typeset on paper) but a malleable, changeable world? As Kinross says, "At least here there really is fluidity and the possibility of change..."(p.15) Now that's powerful knowledge, indeed.

[[anne > louise: whew! did we just come to a screeching neatly wrapped-up halt? how's that for authority? i'm suspicious, it all feels a little too comfortable to me.]]

[[louise > anne: yeah, well, it just seems sooooooo serious, like we've tried to make these perfect academic arguments while deconstructing them at the same time. by taking things so seriously do we just reinforce the means by which knowledge gets considered legitimate in the first place - seriousness?! i still think that "tickling authority"

section should go in. afraid you'll undermine your own authority?]]

[[anne > louise: well, yeah. because then it means we've got to be lenny bruce or something. i don't do comedy.]]

[[louise > anne: no one's asking you to be smart and funny. i'm talking about the subversive element in laughter. my pal rafael gave this talk and he said (loosely quoting) how in umberto eco's novel, _The Name of the Rose_, it's the books on humor and laughter that are kept secretly hidden in the innermost part of the library's labyrinth - evidently because of the dangerous knowledge they contain. so here's a question from outta left field: what if humor was the twist that made the knees of authority buckle a bit, caused the pedestal of truth to wobble and the monument of meaning to teeter - i mean, titter? not the mean-spirited smarmyness of irony, but a humor that pulls the chair out from under anything that postures itself too high and mighty.]]

[[anne > louise: oh yeah, like when you can't stop laughing in class and the teacher gets mad and turns all red and the madder your teacher gets, the harder you have to laugh? i always got in trouble for laughing in class and the thing that still makes me smile, even as i'm writing this at age 32, is thinking about that pure, deep frustration the teacher must have felt, the inability to control, while i was having a blast...]]

[63]

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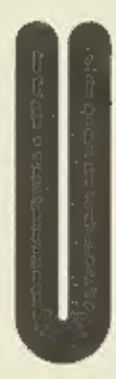
Hello.

I am this year's design intern at the Walker Art Center, a contemporary art museum in Minneapolis. I have a master's degree in communications design from Pratt Institute in New York; I studied and worked there for three years before landing here. For the past eight months I have plunged into the design and production of several exhibitions and created dozens of brochures, postcards, banners, and posters for the music, dance, film, visual arts, and education programs at the museum. I also hammer out a fairly complex monthly programming calendar for the institution and have been involved with that publication's redesign, which uses a twisted new typeface designed by Matthew Carter exclusively for the Walker. We are in the midst of working on several catalogues, including ones on Willem de Kooning and Dawoud Bey. As intern, I am part of a tight team of seven people who frequently must tackle about 45 (large to small) projects a week. A considerable part of my work here is type-oriented: serious type work-outs (hierarchies, information, content), formats for long-term projects, type designs and redesigns. As a department, we are currently diving into multimedia and online research; alternative ways for merging word and image and the print and electronic processes. This year, the new intern will be involved in the development of *Digital Campfires*, a design exhibition planned to open at the Walker in 1997. Because this is a 12-month internship, with a salary of $18,000 per year (with full benefits and a $1,000 travel allowance), you really have to be passionate about collaboration within a major museum, or you won't last. You need to have a BFA or an MFA in design. Send us a letter of interest, 10 slides, and the names of three design professionals who will speak highly of you (also send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the return of your slides). Apply to Laurie Haycock Makela, Design Director, Walker Art Center, Vineland Place, Minneapolis, MN 55403, by May 20. Interviews for selected candidates will take place in Minneapolis around June 1. The job begins July 1 and ends late June, 1996. AA/EOE.
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